

MASTER'S THESIS

Thematising Sexuality in ELT: Using the Novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* and the Film *Love, Simon* to Promote Intercultural Competence

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August 2018

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Acknowledgements

This thesis was conducted at Østfold University College, Faculty of Business, Languages and Social Sciences, in the period of January to August 2018. The thesis is part of the master program in Foreign Language Teaching.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Eva Lambertsson Björk and Jutta Eschenbach, for being the most brilliant cheerleading squad during this process (and the master program in general); they have been incredibly patient, encouraging and constructive in their feedback, and deserve to know that they do an *amazing* job. I am also grateful to my best friend Thomas Rasmussen for his support, and my family for always helping me keep my eye on the prize and reminding me of the importance of my education. I would also like to thank the marketing director at 20th Century Fox, Eva Moe, for allowing me to attend the screening of *Love, Simon* before its release. And, of course, I am grateful to all of my friends who have told me “What an exciting thesis – you can do it!”

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Due to internationalisation and globalisation, the world is becoming increasingly connected, and cultural heterogeneity, as well as encounters between people of different cultural backgrounds, values and norms, becomes more and more commonplace. The future therefore requires as a key qualification “the ability to deal constructively on an interpersonal level with cultural diversity and a multitude of attitudes, values, norms, belief systems and ways of life” (Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 3). In other words, multiculturalism calls for a competence that enables us to communicate efficiently and appropriately with other people, regardless of their cultural background. This competence can furthermore result in more social cohesion and less social exclusion, and cultural diversity can be viewed as a positive addition to society (Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 4). What is implied here, is the need for intercultural competence (henceforth IC).

There are multiple definitions of the term IC, however, the one that will be used in this text is as follows: “Intercultural competence is the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations; it is supported by specific attitudes and affective features, (inter)cultural knowledge, skills and reflection” (Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 4). This definition implies that IC is about interaction – preferably in effective and appropriate ways when different cultures meet. It furthermore highlights some central aspects or components that intercultural speakers maintain, namely intercultural *attitudes*, *knowledge*, two sets of *skills*, and *reflection* (also referred to as *critical cultural awareness*).

Michael Byram, Bella Gribkova and Hugh Starkey (2002) describe the concept of IC and discuss how teachers can incorporate an intercultural dimension in language teaching. In contrast to ordinary language teaching, language teaching *with* an intercultural dimension not only helps learners develop linguistic competence (i.e. how to speak correctly) and communicative competence (i.e. how to speak appropriately), but also teaches IC (i.e. how to communicate effectively and appropriately, and how to develop an understanding of and respectful attitudes towards people from different societies and view these people as complex human beings with multiple identities and an own individuality) (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, pp. 9-10).

Accordingly, it is the purpose of this thesis to design and discuss a teaching sequence that aims at

promoting greater mutual understanding and acceptance of differences in our multicultural and multilingual society.

When thematising culture, cultural groups and intercultural encounters, researchers often pay attention to encounters between people with different nationalities (Horňákov, 2014; Scherto, 2007; Vogt, 2016). Quite seldom do researchers focus upon encounters between people of different sexualities, that is, people who identify themselves as heterosexual encountering people identifying themselves as non-heterosexual (henceforth queer¹). Thus, I find it interesting and important to investigate this quite unexplored area, and intend to investigate how learners can become interculturally competent and prepared for encountering people with a different sexuality.

Sexuality is a theme that triggers the interest of teenagers in lower secondary school because it becomes increasingly relevant to them in this period of their lives, as they are at an age of transition. Their interests is apparent in, for example, novels written for a young audience, which typically focus on issues related to physical and mental development (Wiland, 2016, p. 102). Sexuality is not just about sex, but also identity and sexual orientation, and is therefore a universal theme that applies to all teenagers whether they define themselves as heterosexual or queer. Sexuality may be a sensitive theme that some learners – and teachers too – find uncomfortable and refrain from discussing. However, since most Norwegian classrooms are getting increasingly heterogenous and multicultural, it would be difficult to avoid every taboo and every sensitive theme in the classroom. One may argue that avoiding subjects like racism, mental illness and sexual diversity may be disadvantageous for learners, as they possibly have questions about the subjects, and avoiding them may lead to ignorance and perhaps fear and anxiety of what is unfamiliar (Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 8). Further, addressing sensitive themes is an important step in the process of growing and maturation (Wiland, 2016, p. 123). Thus, sensitive themes should be thematised in the classroom to introduce them for those who lack knowledge and experiences (i.e. develop unfinished schemata, or background information) and to praise and maintain learners' relevant knowledge and experiences (i.e. recognise existing schemata) (Wiland, 2016, p. 235).

¹ Queer: “Denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms” (“queer,” n.d.).

In addition to promoting growth and maturation, thematising sexuality benefits learners as it may prevent or eliminate prejudice and stereotypes. Stereotyping is the act of categorising particular groups or people based on (typically negative) assumptions, ideas or generalisations, and assuming that all member of the same culture or society are the same. Stereotypes must be challenged in order to enable learners to develop as good co-citizens who see members of other cultures as complex human beings. Also prejudices must be overcome. Prejudicing is the act of pre-judging people or groups of people based on ignorance or stereotypical assumptions (Byram et al., 2002, p. 21). Signe M. Wiland (2016, pp. 234-235) emphasises the importance of reducing prejudices about homosexuality, as prejudices cause the unfair treatment from which queer people suffer. In order to challenge stereotypes and prejudices, and, in the context of this thesis, promote positive attitudes towards sexual diversity, teachers can incorporate an intercultural dimension into the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom (Byram et al., 2002, p. 9).

The amount of queer-related material in Norwegian schools is, generally speaking, very limited. A recent study shows that a number of queer lower secondary learners in Norway experience course material as limited, excluding and mostly based on stereotypes. Further, learners sometimes feel marginalised and even discriminated against because of the attitudes towards or lessons about queer subjects that course material such as textbooks maintain (Rognerudengen, 2016, p. 16). In order to avoid the problems of existing course materials, literature and film offer alternatives. Besides being useful resources for enhancing language proficiency, literature has been a traditional tool in the classroom for portraying the real world, and film is a more modern tool that presents authentic input. Literature is typically viewed as a window, offering views of the world (Drangeid, 2014, p. 21). Viewing the world through literature may enable learners to understand life situations that they have not experienced themselves. Through literature about queer culture, learners may be enabled to understand what it is like to be a member of a minority group on a personal and emotional level (Wiland, 2016, p. 235). Moreover, film adaptations generate interest in literary works, as the reading provides each learner with various inner images, and make them look forward to comparing their own images with the visuals in the movie (Engelstad, 2013, p. 93). Due to these reasons, it is not uncommon that ELT teachers supplement the literature learners read with the film adaptation, as films are not just entertaining supplements to the reading, but may also provide learners with additional background information and images, and enable them to adapt new feelings and thoughts to the novel (Ismaili, 2013, p. 122).

Before bringing literature and films into the lower secondary classroom, teachers must make some careful considerations of whether the material is relevant and appropriate. As stated in Berk (2009a): “A student who is offended by a video clip will withdraw, turn off, and harbor anger, which are emotions hardly conducive to learning” (p. 28). Put differently, using the wrong material might impede learning rather than promote learning.

The (queer) learners in my previous study experienced that the school failed to provide them with lessons that made them feel included and acknowledged (Rognerudengen, 2016, p. 22). The question is then how to remedy this. Kevin K. Kumashiro (2000) works with anti-oppressive education: He discusses the concepts *education for the Other* and *education about the Other*, that is, how teachers can improve the learning environment for the so-called Other², typically being marginalised or minority groups or individuals, or those who do not follow “norms” (Kumashiro, 2000, pp. 26-27). One way Kumashiro (2000) suggests for teachers to promote anti-oppressive education, is: “to include specific units on the Other [in curricula], such as curricular units on labor history and resistance (...) literature by and/or about queers (...) or the representation of queers in films” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 32).

The material that will be analysed and discussed in this text are the novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) (henceforth the Simon-novel), written by Becky Albertally, and the adapted film version *Love, Simon* (2018) (henceforth the Simon-film), directed by Greg Berlanti. These two works fulfil the demand of appropriate and useful materials, as they are suitable for the audience, enable learners to achieve multiple instructions in official steering documents, and provide authentic, educational information that may help learners in developing their IC. Hence, this text will discuss how teachers can use the Simon-novel and -film effectively and appropriately in the ELT classroom to promote IC.

1.2. Aim

The English subject is not just about enhancing learners’ language proficiency, but also about enhancing learners’ IC. Accordingly, what this text will investigate and discuss is whether the selected material (i.e. the Simon-novel and -film) can be used as teaching tools to enhance

² In addition to Kumashiro’s terms, this text will use words such as Otherness as the opposite to normalcy.

learners' IC, in order to challenge stereotypes and prejudices, and promote positive attitudes towards sexual diversity. The research question is thus:

To what extent can the novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) and the film *Love, Simon* (2018) promote learners' intercultural competence in the ELT lower secondary classroom?

This text will investigate to what extent my suggested lesson plan incorporates an intercultural dimension including the five IC components, and thus prepares learners to encounter, respect, and/or embrace queer culture.

1.3. Overview of study

This text will (1) investigate the appropriateness of the selected material through literary and film analysis, and (2) suggest a lesson plan (called *the Simon-project*) that uses the selected material to challenge stereotypes and prejudices about queer culture, and to promote positive attitudes towards sexual diversity through anti-oppressive education.

In chapter 2, there will be a presentation and discussion of my theoretical framework. Particularly IC, the idea about Net Geners, and anti-oppressive education will be elaborated on, and steering documents such as the "Overall Part", the English subject curriculum and the Education Act will be presented. Then, the method used to carry out this study will be presented in chapter 3. As the method of this study is literary and film analysis, this chapter will present the criteria used for selecting the material. The chapter will discuss why the two Simon texts are particularly appropriate for the purpose of this study, in connection with the theories in chapter 2. Thereafter, chapter 4 presents the lesson plan, with elaborations on what will be done, how so, and why, to answer the research question. The lesson plan will be presented in the form of a didactic scheme, where the didactic decisions will be discussed in relation to the intercultural dimension. Finally, there is the *Conclusion*, which will summarise the study and answer the research question.

2. Theoretical preliminaries

In this chapter, there will be a presentation of the theories used as a basis for the lesson plan. These theoretical preliminaries include official steering documents relevant for this thesis, the concept of IC, Ronald Berk's perception of today's learners (Net Geners), and Kumashiro's ideas for anti-oppressive education.

2.1. Official steering documents

In this sub-chapter I will show how the English subject defines criteria when it comes to attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness from learners. Three documents, connected to the English subject, advocate the importance of intercultural learning. They are the "Overall Part", the English Subject curriculum, and the Quality Framework. Consequently, I will show how the English subject incorporates an intercultural dimension, and will do so by presenting relevant instructions and competence aims in these three official steering documents.

What should be kept in mind throughout is that "intercultural" is, as mentioned above, a collective term for the encounters of all types of cultures. Thus, focusing on cultural features and intercultural understanding in these official steering documents implies focusing on sexual diversity as well as other cultural varieties.

2.1.1. The Overall Part

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research emphasised through white papers in 2016 that the cultural dimension in course curricula must be renewed. As the Norwegian society has become increasingly diversified, the curricula must indicate the importance of equality, and respect for diversity (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, p. 21).

The National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training (also referred to as LK06) describes a Core Curriculum for the Norwegian school. The Core Curriculum explains the Education Act (i.e. the laws related to the Norwegian school system), and describes the values, learning goals and knowledge goals of the Norwegian school. In 2017 the government developed the "Overall Part", a new version of the Core Curriculum, based on the white papers presented above. It will come into effect in the near future. As this thesis concerns future education, it will take the Overall Part into consideration, rather than the Core Curriculum.

According to the Overall Part, cultural, linguistic and philosophical diversity among learners impacts the school environment. In childhood and adolescent years, development of self-esteem, self-respect and a confident identity is particularly important. As identities are unique, we all depend on the fact that differences are, not only respected, but also valued. The school is to support learners' development of their own identities and to make them feel that they belong in school and in society. The school should help learners in maintaining and developing their identities in an inclusive and diverse community (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, pp. 5-6).

Children and young people need a predictable environment with safe frameworks and good role models with whom they can discuss and deal with difficult questions. In order to get this ideal environment, the school must safeguard cultural diversity. The school is to promote democratic values and attitudes to counter prejudice and discrimination, and help learners respect difference, and resolve conflicts in a peaceful way (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 9).

According to Berk (2009b, p. 12), young people today are exposed to diversity through the Internet, and are therefore usually quite tolerant of diversity. However, although learners are not completely unknowing about sexual diversity, it may be unfamiliar (Wiland, 2016, p. 234), and therefore still important to thematise.

2.1.2. The Quality Framework

The Quality Framework summarises and elaborates on the laws and regulations of official steering documents relating to the Norwegian school. It is clearly stated that the school should ensure that the pupils' learning environment promotes safety and contentment. The school should stimulate the pupils' personal development and help them understand their democratic rights (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006, p. 2). To enable pupils to develop personally as individuals in a democratic society is a central aim in the framework, and will therefore be central in the lesson plan.

Other relevant instructions in the Quality Framework are that the Norwegian school should enable pupils to acquire knowledge about different cultures and ways of life, in order to develop their cultural competence and prepare them for a multicultural society. The framework instructs Norwegian schools to “promote cultural understanding and develop self-insight and identity, respect and tolerance” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006, p. 3). The Quality Framework

thus demands that pupils should have the opportunity to develop the IC components knowledge (cultural understanding), critical cultural awareness (self-insight) and attitudes (respect and tolerance).

2.1.3. The English Subject Curriculum

In the English Subject curriculum, there are at least two areas where the ability to decentre (i.e. relativising one's own cultural determinants, and be openminded towards Otherness) is focused on, namely in the purpose-area and the competence aims-area. Firstly, the purpose-area, which describes the overarching objectives of the English subject, states that language learning is not the only objective of the subject, but the subject should provide an insight into the cultures and lives of people who live in English-speaking countries (Ministry of Education and Research, 2013, p. 1). This suggestion can be related to IC, as it encourages the development of knowledge about communicative processes and cultural norms, and not just superficial cultural traits, since culture is in flux and very difficult to determine.

Secondly, the English Subject curriculum presents a comprehensive list of competence aims to be achieved during lower secondary school, and one of them is particularly relevant for this thesis: “discuss and elaborate on the way people live and how they socialise in Great Britain, USA and other English-speaking countries and Norway” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2013, p. 8). This competence aim encourages pupils to understand their own and others' lives and cultures. As it encourages pupils to review their own culture too, one may argue that the aim implies IC; it is insufficient, not to say impossible, to develop an understanding and respectful attitude towards Otherness if one does not also analyse one's own values critically. To sum up, the English subject promotes that Norwegian pupils should be able to become intercultural speakers rather than “just” speakers of the English language.

2.2. Intercultural competence (IC)

The view on language skills vs. intercultural competence has changed over the years. One specialist once admitted that:

I used to think language skills were as important as cultural adaptability, but I now believe adaptability is far more important. ...It can be very dangerous to pick people because they have language skills and then find out they have very little cultural adaptability *and* little interest in adapting (Brake, 1997, p. 62 in Deardorff, 2009, p. 70).

Similarly, few experts today believe that the ELT classroom should be entirely about language learning – a perception that also applies for this thesis.

As presented above, IC consists of five components, namely intercultural attitudes, knowledge, two sets of skills and critical cultural awareness. In the following, each of the five components will be elaborated on. Some closely related terms when discussing these components are values, beliefs and behaviors. For the sake of simplicity, these terms will hereafter be referred to as “cultural determinants”.

Attitudes:

The foundation of IC is the intercultural *attitudes* of the intercultural speaker, particularly open-mindedness, respect, curiosity, and readiness to suspend own cultural determinants. Speakers with intercultural attitudes are willing to relativise their own cultural determinants, and do not assume that they are the only possible and correct ones; they believe that others’ cultural determinants may just as well be (more) possible and correct. The intercultural speaker is therefore able to decentre (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 11-12).

A positive, open and appreciative attitude towards intercultural situations is fundamental for learning IC. The intercultural attitude is emotional and affective rather than cognitive, and must be taught accordingly. Speakers who do not have or refuse acquiring intercultural attitudes, however, may become uncertain, fearful and anxious when encountering intercultural situations. This may furthermore lead to speakers defending their own and offending others’ identities. To avoid this from happening, speakers must remain openminded and respectful towards ambiguities and Otherness, and constantly reflect on intercultural experiences (Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 8).

Knowledge:

Another central factor in IC is intercultural *knowledge*. This component barely concerns specific knowledge about certain cultural groups – as this might be facts based on assumptions and myths – but rather knowledge about other cultures’ ways of interacting and socialising. Ulf Hannerz (1992 in Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 6) suggested that culture is in flux, that is, culture is dynamic and in constant change, and therefore superficial facts about a culture are, on their own, insufficient for defining a culture. Furthermore, knowledge is not just about the

interlocutor's culture, but also about knowing one's own. This means that in addition to trivial knowledge about the Other, the IC component includes knowledge about social processes of other cultures and of how interlocutors are likely to perceive you (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12).

Bertelsmann Stiftung and Fondazione Cariplo (2008) elaborate on the knowledge component, which can be summarised as follows: “an understanding of others’ world views, values, norms and ways of life, [and] the role and impact cultural elements exert on behavior and communication” (p. 9). The component includes an understanding of the Other's cultural determinants, and how cultural elements and contexts control their mindsets and behavior.

Skills:

Just like attitudes and knowledge, skills are important. Bertelsmann Stiftung and Fondazione Cariplo (2008, p. 9) even attach more importance to skills and communication based on behavior (conative), than on knowledge (cognitive).

There are two sets of skills-components, namely *skills of interpreting and relating* and *skills of discovery and interaction*. First, skills of interpreting and relating is the ability to compare ideas and events from one's own and the Other's culture, and trying to view the cultures as objectively as possible. By doing so, one can understand how and why intercultural misunderstandings might emerge and how they might be solved. In other words, an intercultural speaker is able to compare cultures, that is, interpret the Other's culture and explain and relate it to one's own (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 12-13).

Second, because it is impossible to know for sure everything one needs to know about a foreign culture, it is useful to know how to discover new knowledge and integrate it with already existing schemata. Accordingly, intercultural speakers know how to communicate with people from different cultures as resources to find out about and preferably understand their cultural determinants. In other words, they have skills of discovery and interaction. This requires skills other than just simply making conversation; learners need to know how to interact well, because knowledge about own cultural determinants is often unconscious and is not always easy to explain intuitively (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). Learners must discover new knowledge about the Other's culture and cultural practices, and interact well (i.e. using their intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills as tools).

Critical cultural awareness:

Finally, learners need the ability to be aware of values. That is, they need to learn the ability of becoming aware of their own principles and standards of behaviour, and to learn seeing clearly how these values impact the way they view the Other's values – an ability formally referred to as *critical cultural awareness*. This ability is crucial; without it, learners may generate negative reactions and rejection (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). Learners must learn how to be critically aware of not only the Other's values, but also their own.

This component is sometimes also referred to as intercultural reflection. Bertelsmann Stiftung and Fondazione Cariplo (2008, p. 10) argue that this component requires for intercultural speakers to change perspective, that is, relativising and expanding their own cultural determinants. In doing so, learners need, firstly, to reflect upon their own cultural world view and ways of life, and not seeing them as absolute. Secondly, this reflection will not just influence learners' cognitive perceptions – it can also induce an affective evaluation of Otherness. Thus, through intercultural reflection, or becoming critically aware of their own and the Other's culture, learners might develop an ability to respect Otherness both cognitively and emotionally, and reduce the risk of fearing Otherness (Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 10).

2.3. Net Geners

Learners who grew up in the 1990s, as well as today's learners, have been surrounded by digital technology and the Internet all their lives. This inspired Don Tapscott (1998) to brand this generation the Net Generation, or Net Geners. The term reflects the deep influence digital technology has on these learners, and how it has come to define them today (Berk, 2009b, p. 5). Adapted teaching is not just about adapting tasks to learners' proficiency level, but generally adapting teaching to meet learners' interests and needs, in order to help them learn more. Accordingly, in what follows, there will be outlined eleven characteristics and habits concerning Net Geners presented by Berk (2009b, pp. 9-13) that are relevant for the Simon-project.

1. Net Geners are viewed as *technology savvy*, meaning they have great experience with, are familiar with, and are quite skilled with using technology.
2. Approximately 89 percent of all learners today *rely on search engines* such as Google for information.

3. They are *interested in multimedia*, and used to entertainment, videos, and finding information themselves. Incorporating media such as music and videos into the classroom, is crucial for connecting with their culture
4. Net Geners do not just use technology eagerly for assistance, they also *contribute to its content*, for example through making videos on YouTube. In other words, they are not just consumers of the Internet, they also develop it and comment on it.
5. Today's learners prefer *learning by doing*, rather than being instructed and reading manuals. Net Geners are "kinaesthetic, experiential, hands-on learners" (Berk, 2009b, p. 10), and therefore prefer practical work before reading textbooks. First-person learning is suggested, such as simulation and roleplaying.
6. Because learners today have a short attention span, they easily get impatient and bored. Teachers should therefore design "*speedy*" lessons where learners are engaged with doing tasks, preferably ones they find amusing. This also entails that Net Geners expect quick pay-offs and instant gratification for their performances.
7. Net Geners are *visually literate*, that is, they prefer an image-rich learning environment rather than text-only environment. Some of the visuals they prefer are pictures and videos. As a consequence, they are skilled at creating videos consisting of images, text and sound.
8. These learners are emotionally open, and find it *easy expressing their feelings*. They typically like meeting new people and sharing personal information. Furthermore, Net Geners typically seek to express and share their opinions and ideas with their classmates, for example through discussions.
9. Because learners are exposed to diversity regularly through the Internet, today's learners typically *embrace diversity and multiculturalism*. 72 percent of all Net Geners are tolerant, appreciative and sensitive for multiculturalism (Pryor et al., 2008, in Berk, 2009, p. 12).
10. Net Geners crave group activities, as this allows for *collaboration and face-to-face interaction*. Teamwork and collaboration enable learners to develop their collective intelligence, that is, shared knowledge that emerges through teamwork.
11. Finally, today's learners prefer *typing notes on their computers* or cell phones rather than taking notes in handwriting.

Understanding what today's learners are like and the technologies they use makes it easier to connect with them, and taking this knowledge into consideration may be beneficial when designing lesson plans. The characteristics will thus be taken into consideration when designing the lesson plan for the Simon-project.

2.4. Anti-oppressive education

There are learners who do not experience school as an including or acknowledging place (Rognerudengen, 2016, p. 22). Kumashiro (2000) discusses how teachers can promote anti-oppressive education. He writes about *Education for the Other*, that is, lessons that are constructed in favour of the Other (Kumashiro, 2000, pp. 26-27). In order to practice Education for the Other well, schools need to be affirming of the Other, to offer spaces for learners to communicate with understanding people, and to provide resources, such as literature, that enable the Others to challenge oppression themselves (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 28).

In addition to the aim that no learners should feel marginalised, a second reason for anti-oppressive education is to prevent or eliminate prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminative attitudes and behaviour. It is important to educate learners about marginalised groups or individuals, such as, for example, queers, in order to promote knowledge. Kumashiro (2002) refers to this concept as *Education about the Other*. He points out that it is not uncommon that schools provide two kinds of knowledge about the Other that can actually result in harming the Other rather than helping; namely (1) knowledge about what society views as “normal” (i.e. the way things are) and normative (i.e. the way things ought to be) – and how Otherness is in contrast to this, and (2) knowledge about the Other that is often misleading and distorted because it is based on stereotypes or myths. What learners seldom learn is how they can challenge these stereotypes and misinterpretations (Kumashiro, 2000, pp. 31-32). To ensure that the lesson plan is anti-oppressive, it includes both education for the Other and education about the Other.

3. Analysis of novel and film

Literature and films are listed as typical tools for promoting IC. This study makes use of both media, and this chapter will discuss whether these selected media, as well as the specific book and film, are valid selections.

3.1. The Simon story

The Simon-story is about the 16-year-old boy Simon Spier, who sees himself as a high school teenager with a totally normal life, except he is gay. Simon lives a seemingly perfect life in a suburban area with his middle-class family and group of friends. He has the same routine every day, including picking up his friends and ice-coffee on his way to school, and having lunch with the same group of people at the same lunch table every day. At the lunch table are Simon's closest friends Leah and Nick, Abby who transferred to his school just a few months ago, the football boys Garrett and Bram and two other friends. They seem to be the type of friends who share everything with each other, but they do not know about Simon's sexual orientation, or that he is communicating on-line with another gay boy, Blue.

Simon discovered Blue on the school's website CreekSecrets when Blue posted a poem about loneliness. They then started an email correspondence, and Simon soon fell in love with Blue. However, Simon does not know who Blue is, not his real name or what he looks like, except that he goes to the same school as he. After a while, Simon becomes curious about who Blue is, and starts investigating who he might be.

One day when Simon checks his emails on one of the school's library computers, he forgets to sign out of his email-account. One of his classmates, Martin, sees the email conversation between Simon and Blue, and takes screenshots. He then blackmails Simon into matching him up with Simon's friend Abby, threatening with publishing the screenshots of the emails on the school's website. In order to handle this conflict and prevent Blue and himself from being "outed" about their sexual orientation, Simon starts manipulating his friends and orchestrating their love lives.

When Simon fails to match Martin up with Abby, Martin publishes a post on the school's website where he reveals Simon's sexual orientation. At the same time, Simon's friends find out that he has been orchestrating their love lives and has been keeping secrets from them, and they get

angry with him. Simon becomes a victim of bullying, and only his drama teacher stands up for him. Simon realises that he must come to terms with his identity. He finds a way to get his friends back, and eventually discover who Blue is. At the end of the story, the friend group reunites, Simon finds out who Blue is, and they become boyfriends.

3.2. Analysing the two media

It is important when analysing adapted films and comparing them with the original book that learners do it critically instead of judging the adaptation on obvious and trivial differences. For example, Engelstad (2013, p. 96) argues that criticising a film for not being as comprehensive as the original novel, would not be fair to the filmmakers, as it would be almost impossible to include every single aspect of a novel within the typical running-time of a feature film. In the adaptation process from book to film, there is almost always a reduction. The filmmakers must make decisions about what should be cut out. The filmmakers must also determine what to keep, add and modify when writing the screenplay (Engelstad, 2013, p. 104).

Instead of analysing an adaptation based on its comprehensiveness, Engelstad (2013, p. 96) suggests when carrying out an analysis of book and film, to analyse the *narration*, the *expression level* and the *thematic* – a way of analysing will be relevant in this chapter, as well as in the lesson plan. Firstly, with *narration*, Engelstad (2013) suggests to study what are some differences in the story – and why. For example, whether there are any major events (core functions) in the film that are not similar to the description in the book. Or, concerning characters, which characters have been kept, added, removed, or changed – and why. Secondly, Engelstad (2013) refers to *expression level* as technical specifications about the adapted media. For example, one may study why the filmmaker has decided on casting the particular actors or actresses, the lighting, the choice of music, the angles of the camera, the cutting and editing, and so on. Thirdly, with *thematic*, Engelstad (2013) discusses how the narration level and expression level enhance the theme of the story. A question to be asked when studying thematics, is which theme is the most central one. One may also question why some themes have been kept, added or removed – and why. Furthermore, after studying these three steps, one may make evaluations of the adaptation based on questions such as: Did the film adapt difficult passages well? Does the film shed new light over the story? Will the film reach a wider audience than the book did alone? And, most importantly, has it become a good movie? (Engelstad, 2013, p. 97).

3.3. Using the Simon-story as a teaching tool

The story is one of the most popular stories of all times about a queer teenager. *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) is the number one best seller in the genre Teen & Young Adult Gay & Lesbian Fiction on the e-commerce website www.Amazon.com, as well as the number four best seller with the audiobook edition and number five with the kindle edition, per June 9, 2018. Needless to say, the book is incredibly popular even three years after publication, and is rated with 4.8 out of 5 stars by the website users (Amazon, 2018). Furthermore, the film adaptation was the first major Hollywood studio film in history to star a queer protagonist.

According to the film's Wikipedia-page:

As of June 7, 2018, *Love, Simon* has grossed \$40.8 million in the United States and Canada, and \$17.3 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$58.1 million [...] ranking #14 out of all films since 1980 in the teen romance genre ("Love, Simon," 2018).

To put it differently, even if the film has not been released worldwide yet, it has just as the novel, had great success. However, these results do not necessarily legitimise bringing the material into the classroom. Before doing so, there are critical considerations to be taken into account.

Simon-novel:

Diana Mitchell claims that reading about diverse citizens in literature can help learners gain information and knowledge (Mitchell, 2003, p. 201). This implies that multicultural literature can be educational. She does, however, suggest that before bringing multicultural literature into the classroom, its literary, educational and sociopolitical qualities must be considered. Firstly, literary considerations involve evaluating how engaging the plot is; if the characters are well developed; if the setting connects to the story; how interesting and rich the themes are to learners; and whether the writing style is pleasant for the audience (Mitchell, 2003, p. 213). Considering literary qualities of a novel may be viewed as a subjective task. However, one may argue based on this novel's reader-friendly language, and identifiable topics such as identity, sexuality, friendship, and love, that the plot is interesting and the themes engaging for the majority of lower secondary learners. In addition, the book won the William C. Morris Award in 2016 ("William C. Morris Award," 2018), which alone may verify its literary quality.

Secondly, teachers must make some educational considerations. These considerations involve evaluating the educational purpose of the novel, determining if the text matches the audience, and

if the story may stimulate discussions, and whether the novel displays differences and provides information about people of foreign cultures and their ways of life (Mitchell, 2003, p. 213). By bringing the Simon-novel into the ELT lower secondary classroom, learners can achieve at least one competence aim in the English subject curriculum concerning intercultural learning explicitly, namely: “discuss and elaborate on the way people live and how they socialise” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2013, p. 9). By reading the novel learners may get an insight into queer peoples’ ways of life. Furthermore, because the novel includes current and relevant themes, such as sexuality and bullying, it may arouse learners’ interest and promote critical discussion. The novel is moreover a coming-of-age rom-com college novel about teenagers, and thus appropriate for the audience. That the novel portrays differences is clear, as it thematises and portrays the lives and struggles of both heterosexual and queer people.

Thirdly, some sociopolitical qualities that should be taken into consideration are authenticity and authority (Mitchell, 2003, pp. 213-214). In brief, authenticity refers to how authentically cultures are presented in literature, and authority refers to the role of the authors who represent cultures and have control of the literature’s authenticity (Bista, 2012, p. 318). The fact that Albertally is not a queer teenage boy, and thus does not have authority, challenges the novel’s authenticity. Further, there are very few traits defining queer cultures, except that queer people do not identify themselves as heterosexual. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether or not the queer characters and their situations are authentic. However, one may argue that there are some common stereotypes for queer people, such as feminine, flamboyant homosexuals who are tidy, love Madonna and are not relationship-oriented (Lipp, 2017) – but none of these apply to Simon’s character. So, although it is difficult to determine the authenticity of Simon’s character, Albertally seems to have disregarded stereotypes – which are often inauthentic – when creating the character. Furthermore, in an interview, Albertally comments that:

For the most part, my reaction from – you know, just like – the gay community who have reached out to me, which may be – you know – a subset of the community, but has been positive, and that is – you know – that’s so important to me. I take that – like – really, really seriously (Lance Rubin, 2016).

One could perhaps assume that an author portraying a queer character entirely inauthentically would not receive such positive feedback from his or her readers. Albertally’s answer may, of course, be influenced by her wanting to project a certain image, but in the same interview she also admits that she cannot achieve the same optimal authenticity as some gay men could have

done. Yet, the reviews on Amazon, as well as the popularity of the book, imply that something about the novel appeals to the readers, and that it is seen as quite – if not completely – authentic. Other questions concerning sociopolitical considerations are: “Are a range of characters represented?” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 213) and “Are majority characters always the saviors?” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 214). Concerning the former question, the society depicted is multicultural. The gay characters described are both young, old, coloured, white, theatre enthusiasts, football players, feminine and masculine. As for the latter question, the character representing the majority, Martin (white heterosexual boy), does not turn out as a hero in the story. In fact, there are no heroes in the story, but Martin and the homophobic bullies are rather portrayed as the least sympathetic characters in the novel.

In conclusion, based on the literary, educational and sociopolitical qualities of the book, it is indeed a valid selection to bring into the classroom.

Simon-film:

It is important to consult relevant criteria before selecting films for application in the classroom. In this section, I will discuss why *Love, Simon* (2018) is a good choice for the lower secondary classroom, by relating it to Berk’s (2009a, p. 6) three sets of criteria for selecting films, namely (a) the learners’ characteristics, (b) the offensiveness of the film, and (c) the film’s structure.

Firstly, concerning learners’ characteristics, teachers should consider learners’ age or grade level, gender, ethnicity, and language-dominance. Showing inappropriate films to learners may trigger anger or sadness, which prevents learning (Berk, 2009a, p. 7). The Simon-film is rated G (general audiences) and only easily understood English language.

Secondly, the offensiveness of a film refers to material that include provoking or inappropriate features that may be experienced as physically or mentally abusing to learners (Berk, 2009a, p. 7). Films including such features or content can possibly elicit anger and other emotions that hinder learning, and should therefore be avoided. Still, Berk (2009a) notes that there is an exception to this criterion: If the offensive content is part of the information or message that the learners are supposed to get from the film, it may be educational to show anyway – as long as the pupils are emotionally prepared in advance. The Simon-film involves controversial themes such as homosexuality. Some learners might find this theme offending or disturbing due to cultural or

social backgrounds. However, this makes it even more important to use the Simon-film, and provide these learners with anti-oppressive education through education about the Other. Homophobia is typically grounded in ignorance and lack of knowledge (Jeyasingham, 2008, p. 149; Young Scot, n.d.), and abstaining from presenting homophobic learners to content that involves homosexuality allows close-minded learners to maintain oppressive attitudes instead of challenging bigotry and negative feelings towards queer culture and Otherness in general. In addition to providing anti-oppressive education through education about the Other, showing the Simon-film will provide queer learners with education for the Other, as it may educate them in how to challenge oppression.

Thirdly, the film's structure is about guidelines one should take into consideration when creating own short fiction videos (Berk, 2009a, p. 7). However, since such videos are not part of the Simon-project, this criterion will not be elaborated on.

Major differences between the novel and film:

Naturally, multiple differences between the novel and film emerge when analysing the narration, expression level and thematic. However, three aspects are more relevant for the Simon-project than others. These are differences that concern sexuality, (cyber)bullying, and the addition of one character that adds an entirely new dimension to the film that is very relevant to the project.

Firstly, the novel thematises the dangers of uncritical use of the Internet and cyberbullying. For example, Martin uses the Internet to reveal Simon's sexuality anonymously. This also happens in the film, but it is only in the film that Martin publishes the screenshots of Simon and Blue's email conversation, something that ruins their relationship. It is also only in the film that Martin is severely bullied online, that is, subject to cyberbullying. This theme is relevant to the Simon-project as the learners discuss some of the themes from the two works, such as bullying, which is increasingly current in schools today.

Secondly, the film presents different ways of responding to someone revealing their sexuality. In the book, Simon's parents talk to Simon about his sexuality together:

Jack [Simon's father]: "Well, I'm just going to put this out there, in case the message got lost somewhere. I love you. A lot. No matter what. And I know it's got to be awesome having the cool dad."

"Ahem", says my mom.

"Excuse me. The cool parents. The hardcore, badass, hipster parents."

“Oh, it’s awesome,” I say.

[...]

“I’m sorry,” [Simon’s mother] says. “Did we make it a big deal?”

“Oh my God. Seriously? You guys make everything a big deal.”

[...]

“That stuff is exciting,” she says.

“It’s not that exciting,” I say. It’s like – I don’t even know. You guys are so freaking obsessed with everything I do. It’s like I can’t change my socks without someone mentioning it.”

“Ah,” says my dad. “So, what you’re trying to say is that we’re *really creepy*.” (Albertalli, 2015, pp. 247-248).

In the film, however, Simon’s parents are portrayed in separate scenes as they give their individual responses to Simon “coming out” as a homosexual. Further, only in the novel does Simon’s teacher respond directly to Simon, as well as tell her opinion about two homophobic students bullying Simon:

“So I’m sorry you guys had to see that.” She’s looking at me especially. “It was beyond disrespectful and inappropriate, and I want you to know that I take this extremely seriously.”

[...] Then she walks over to me and squats down in front of my platform. “You okay, Simon?”

I feel myself blush a little bit. “I’m fine.”

“Okay, well,” she says quietly. “Just know that those assholes are getting suspended. I’m not even kidding. I will make it my hill to die on.” (Albertalli, 2015, p. 192).

In the film, however, also Simon’s little sister and two best girlfriends, as well as his principal, and gay classmate, have individual scenes where they respond to Simon revealing his sexuality. Two relevant examples from the film are when Simon reveals his sexuality to his mother:

Simon: Did you know?

Emily: I knew you had a secret. When you were little, you were so carefree. But these last few years, more and more, it’s almost like I can feel you holding your breath. I wanted to ask you about it, but I didn’t want to pry. Maybe I made a mistake.

Simon: No. No, mom, you didn’t make a mistake.

Emily: Being gay is your thing. There are parts of it you have to go through alone. I hate that. As soon as you came out, you said, “Mom, I’m still me.” I need you to hear this: You are still you, Simon (IMDb, 2018)

... and his best friend, Abby:

Simon: Are you surprised?

Abby: No.

Simon: So you knew.
Abby: No.
Simon: But you're not surprised?
Abby: Do you want me to be surprised?
Simon: I don't know.
Abby: Ok. Well, I love you (IMDb, 2018).

These scenes can function as positive models for how different people can respond to someone revealing their sexuality. For example, Emily and Abby's ways of responding to Simon in the film can be used as models for how friends and family can speak with someone about his or her, or their own, experiences. The film furthermore presents some unfortunate ways of responding, such as Simon's father's response:

“Jack [Simon's father]: Yeah. So you're gay. Which one of your old girlfriends turned you? Was it the one with the big eyebrow or...
Emily [Simon's mother]: Jack.
Nora [Simon's sister]: Jesus Christ, dad, do you ever shut the hell up?
Jack: I'm kidding.
Nora: It's not funny!
Jack: I'm kidding. Hey, Nora, open up your gift, please?
[an embarrassed Jack exits the living room]” (IMDb, 2018).

In this example, Jack tries using his humour to lighten the mood, but realises his failure, which becomes clear as he leaves the room in shame. Later in the film, however, Simon and Jack have a private conversation where it becomes clear how hard it is for Jack to understand the news, and how much guilt he carries for having been telling gay jokes to Simon throughout his adolescence:

“Jack: How long have you known?
Simon: I was around 13.
Jack: (...) I'm sorry. I shouldn't have missed it.
Simon: No, dad.
Jack: And all the stupid jokes.
Simon: I knew you didn't mean them.
Jack: Just want you to know I love you. I wouldn't change anything about you.
[jack sobs]” (20th Century Fox, 2018).

In addition to showing how people should not respond, this scene also shows that it is not only hard for the one revealing his or her sexuality; it might be difficult for others too.

In conclusion, the six examples may give viewers pointers to how to reveal their sexuality or how to respond or not respond to someone revealing it. The examples may be relevant in the lesson plan, as learners discuss different ways of responding respectfully and disrespectfully to someone revealing their sexuality in the Simon story – an activity that can enable learners to develop their IC.

Thirdly, one character which is very relevant for the Simon-project appears in the film, but not in the novel, namely Ethan. Ethan goes to Simon's school and is also a homosexual. There are two important differences between the two characters; whereas Simon, who is quite masculine, is closeted, Ethan is effeminate and openly gay. As a result of Ethan's characteristics, he is constantly bullied by some of the other students at his school. The film thus presents the difficulties of both being closeted, and of being openly gay. Being openly gay is portrayed as challenging, not just because Ethan is bullied, but also because his mother lies about him to his grandparents: "My mother brags about all the girls I date when we are with my grandparents" (Berlanti, 2018). The film thus portrays the difficulties of being a feminine, openly gay boy, an aspect which is absent in the novel, and the film thus adds a new dimension to the story.

Using a combination of novel and film:

It is not uncommon to use novels and films in the ELT classroom, however, using a combination of a novel and the film adaptation may be less common. By using the combination, readers can see parallels between the book and the film, and the film can enhance aspects in the novel, or add new aspects. For example, the Simon-novel says nothing about the skin-colour of Simon and his three best friends, so readers may imagine, for example, that all of the characters are white. However, when viewing the film, viewers realise that Simon and Leah are white, and Abby and Nick are black. Such examples that emerge by using a combination of novel and film can be related to IC learning, as learners may become aware of their own assumptions.

Firstly, as mentioned, readers create pictures of the story in their heads when reading the novel, or understand the story in a certain way, but by viewing the film they may realise that their presuppositions were based on stereotypes. For example, they may have created a picture of Simon as a feminine homosexual, because that is the image they have of homosexuals. This perception about homosexuals is based on stereotypes and generalisations of how they regard homosexuals. However, when viewing the film, the stereotypes are challenged, as the film proves

that Simon has a quite masculine appearance. In other words, by viewing the film, learners may realise that their own mindset and presuppositions are not always correct. In order to realise that their stereotypes influence their mindset, learners need to make a critical evaluation of their own ideas and perspectives, which calls for the IC component critical cultural awareness (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). Further, using a combination of novel and film helps learners relativise their own values and understand that they have stereotypes about queer people – and relativising own values, beliefs and behaviours is an important part of developing intercultural attitudes (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12).

Secondly, by reading the Simon-novel, readers may get one idea about what queer people are like. In the novel, there are two queer people that readers get particularly familiar with, namely Simon and Bram. Both are quite masculine, and readers therefore only get to know this type of homosexuals. In the film, however, viewers get to know Ethan as well, who is a feminine homosexual. Thus, by viewing the film as well, the learners get a more comprehensive understanding of what queer people may be like. They are exposed to a range of queer characters and can understand that, one, all homosexuals are not alike, and, two, homosexuals, too, are complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individualities. The film therefore provides learners with additional knowledge about homosexual ways of life and socialising, and thus helps them develop their intercultural knowledge (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12).

4. Lesson plan and discussion

4.1. Teaching preliminaries

When discussing didactics and how to perform a lesson plan, it is reasonable to determine whether the lesson will be teacher-centred or learner-centred. In the following I will discuss why this lesson plan practises learner-centred education. Firstly, the concepts of low frame setting and high frame setting are relevant. In a classroom where there is high frame setting, the teacher is a master interpreter and there is only one correct answer. What is a more common class setting today in a Norwegian context, however, is the low frame setting. In this setting, the teaching has a greater openness, which allows for and encourages learners' views and interpretations. Low frame setting often accompanies teaching with great emphasis on collaboration between the learners. The teacher typically seeks to adapt to the learners' level not to appear authoritarian, and the relationship between teacher and student becomes relatively symmetrical. One way of practicing learner-centred education is through *the gradual release of responsibility* (GRR). The key ideas of the model are implied in its name; the lesson is introduced briefly through instructions by the teacher, before responsibility is released gradually to the learners. It enables the learners' creativity to be stimulated in a gradual turn towards student-controlled activities, and calls for their cognitive and linguistic competencies (Drangeid, 2014, p. 104). Teachers can use the simulative midwife method, in order to promote learner-centered education: During childbirth, the ones giving birth must do the job, whereas the midwife has insight and experience to assist the release. Although the teacher has a high level of management (just like the midwife), this process also requires active participation from learners. The midwife method reduces the risk of forming dependent learners and indoctrinating master interpretations and approaches (Drangeid, 2014, p. 97). Enabling learners to participate actively and form independent opinions is important for promoting the democratic values stated in the Overall Part, the Quality Framework and the English Subject Curriculum.

Secondly, when teacher-directed teaching takes place in full classes, the possibilities for adaptation to the individual student are limited. If the teacher is too considerate vis-à-vis weak learners, strong learners, who do not need the scaffolding, may lose interest. However, if the latter can work together or read independently, the teacher can still offer support to those who need it. Learners can then get reading instructions in smaller groups that the teacher has put

together for the occasion, based on newly identified matching needs. This is cognitively demanding teaching for the learner and should therefore not last for too long. The learners themselves read independently, while the teacher checks their understanding and backs up by activating relevant background information. When a problem arises, the teacher does not solve it directly, but allows the learners to engage in the cognitive and metacognitive challenge (Drangeid, 2014, p. 106). In conclusion, this lesson plan presupposes learner-centered teaching, as its goal is to make the learners active participants with independent opinions, and implement adapted teaching for both strong and weak learners.

Gillian Lazar (1993, p. 89) suggests a number of teaching activities using literature. She classifies these activities into three groups, namely pre-reading, while-reading and after-reading activities. In what follows, pre-, while-, and post-reading activities (section 1), as well as pre-, while-, and post-viewing activities (section 2), for the ELT classroom will be presented.

Andreas Müller-Hartmann and Marita Schocker-von Ditzfurth (2007) present a model of Michael Byram's concept of IC. In the model – although they label it intercultural communicative competence – they provide a summary of the five IC components and suggest how the components can be developed. In order to ground the activities in theory, the suggestions of Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditzfurth (2007) will be used as basis for the activities in the Simon-project.

In brief terms, what the learners do in this Simon-project, besides reading the novel and watching the film, includes predicting the story; acquiring relevant, unfamiliar vocabulary; creating booktalk vlogs; roleplaying; writing film reviews for a film magazine; and discussing the stories. Finally, the entire project is rounded up through meeting a representative of queer culture.

4.2. Lesson plan

When planning a lesson, it is important that teachers determine not just *what* will happen, but also *how* and *why*, because deliberate planning ensures that the teaching becomes coherent and that learners learn (Møller, Poulsen, & Steffensen, 2010, p. 13). The *what* describes briefly the key words of the activity. When discussing *how* to execute the *what*, the selection of practical exercises and activities will be presented, and finally the *why* involves the academic view on the teaching, learners and theory (Møller et al., 2010, p. 13). Before presenting the lesson plan in detail, here is some general information:

Learning goal: The learning goal for the Simon-project is for learners to develop their IC; that includes all the five components intercultural attitudes, knowledge, both skills, and critical cultural awareness – in order to become interculturally competent in a sexually diverse world.

Duration: Seven weeks, assuming that each week contains three English lessons.

Tools needed: The project requires a white-board, a projector, a class set of computers with film-editing programmes, as well as the film on DVD/Blu-Ray and a class set of the novel.

Project outline: Week 1 includes an introduction of the theme and project, and some pre- and while-reading activities, as the learners start reading. During weeks 2 and 3, learners continue reading, while doing some while-reading activities. Furthermore, weeks 4 and 5 include more expanded post-reading activities. Weeks 6 and 7 then include viewing the film while working with some while-viewing activities, as well as some post-viewing activities and hosting a guest speaker.

Although the learners could be required to read the novel during the first two weeks, it is preferable to do the project at a more relaxed pace. The learners can thus read one third of the novel each week; that is, chapters 1-10 (90 pages) during week 1, chapters 11-23 (107 pages) in week 2, and chapters 24-35 (106 pages) in week 3. This division sets clear goals for what the learners should achieve each week. The reading goals are achievable for all, as some of the chapters are very short, (there are, for example, four pages in chapter 4 and three pages in chapter 31). Reading the novel over three weeks instead of two also provides the learners with time to do the while-reading activities. The activities are placed in the last lesson each week to avoid interruptions during the other two lessons, when the learners read continuously.

4.2.1. Pre-reading activities

Besides arousing learners' interest and motivation for reading texts, pre-reading activities are designed to activate learners' schemata – that is, their mental framework or background knowledge – about certain topics. Although some might argue that pre-reading activities may ruin the suspense or joy of reading a novel, one benefit of the activities is that they typically make it easier for readers to understand the text. When learning new things, we process it through our schemata first, and relate new information to already established knowledge. Therefore, activating schemata through pre-reading activities is a constructive activity. Even if learners in lower secondary have no or little previous schemata about reading literature, they have schemata

about themes and topics such as sexuality, gender, and identity that they can activate (Wiland, 2016, p. 38).

ACTIVITY 1

What

Understanding theme (sexual diversity) and relevant vocabulary.

How

Teachers teach and discuss vocabulary typically used by queer people, and knowledge about queer peoples' lifestyles, norms and ways of socialising. Examples of relevant vocabulary: Words related to sexualities (homo, queer, gay, lesbian, asexual, pansexual); gender (man, female, transgender, gender fluid); characteristics (feminine and masculine); respectful behaviour (tolerance, respect); disrespectful behaviour (intolerance, microaggression, homophobia); and terms related to social constructs (human rights, equality, prejudices, stereotypes, cultural minorities).

Why

The purpose of this activity is not primarily teaching learners new words and enhance their language skills, but helping them recall or learn new vocabulary that can help them understand the text and can be useful tools when discussing the text in later activities. This approach has support in Byram et al. (2002) who state that: "One important contribution to an intercultural perspective is the inclusion of vocabulary that helps learners talk about cultural diversity" (p. 16). Thus, this vocabulary is useful both for understanding the texts, and for writing summaries, reviews and comparisons, and in discussions. Magne Drangeid (2014, p. 100) asserts that it is important to make sure not to provide learners with too much information about a text, as it might demotivate them. Providing learners with only specific information that is crucial for making them interested in reading and understanding a novel, is the key to a quality pre-reading activity. Then, as the learners start reading the text, more questions and hypotheses will engender, and the teacher and learners can explore more aspects about the text together.

ACTIVITY 2

What

Predictions and discussion.

How

Lazar (1993, p. 84) suggests a number of prediction activities. Correspondingly, partly for implementing adapted teaching, the learners are arranged into three groups according to the difficulty level of the tasks, to solve one of the following prediction activities, before presenting what they have found out to the rest of the class.

Group 1 (easiest level): Make predictions based on the story's title: "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda".

Group 2 (medium level): Make predictions about the story based on the pictures, choice of colours, and fonts on the cover of the book (see Appendix A).

Group 3 (hardest level): Make predictions about the story based on reading the first paragraph only (see Appendix B). Although the activity requires for learners to read the text and is thus not really pre-reading, it is still suggested as a pre-reading activity by Lazar (1993, p. 84) since it initiates expectations and motivates learners to read the novel. It also helps learners realise what they already know about the themes of the text (Day & Park, 2005, p. 63).

Why

It is essential to activate relevant schemata so that learners can create bridges between already familiar and new knowledge. One way of preparing the reading is through letting learners predict what the text will be about, based on their already existing schemata (Drangeid, 2014, pp. 99-100). Thus, they use their schemata about literary texts and the themes and vocabulary they learnt in activity 1 to predict what the Simon-text will be about.

This activity is suitable for Net Geners because it promotes an image-rich environment for most of the learners (group 2) and teamwork for all of them, and allows them to express their opinions. The activity also gives learners time and space to interact with both the teacher and classmates to investigate opinions other than their own, which is preferred by Net Geners (Berk, 2009b, pp. 11-12).

The activity includes brainstorming as learners get together in groups and contribute ideas for what will happen in the story. What is important in this activity is for teachers to formulate

specific rules for the brainstorming, such as not criticising others' ideas and encouraging different viewpoints, especially when others suggest untypical or unconventional continuations to the story. For example, if someone suggests that two girls fall in love with each other, learners should be openminded to the idea and not reject it because it is to some degree an atypical event in young adult literature. Since intercultural attitudes involve the ability to be open-minded towards Otherness (Byram et al., 2002, p. 11), brainstorming activities may then help learners develop this aspect of IC.

Specific IC learning goal

- Be able to share and listen to predictions about the story in an openminded and encouraging manner.

4.2.2. While-reading activities

Some sort of documentation or comprehension activity is according to Drangeid (2014, p. 21) necessary when reading; reading protocols may be a clever way to help learners remember what they have read. Some other benefits of implementing while-reading activities are that they can enhance noteworthy details in the text and cultivate stronger emotional responses than reading sessions without activities. However, one disadvantage of implementing these activities may be that they disturb the reading flow and may ruin learners' spontaneous reactions to the text (Wiland, 2016, p. 28). However, as will be discussed below, while-reading activities might help learners recall what they have read and enable them to understand plot and characters – and these are some of the reasons for why the lesson plan includes while-reading activities.

ACTIVITY 3

What

Understanding the plot.

How

As suggested by Lazar (1993, p. 85), teacher can provide learners with some overall questions to check learners' comprehension of the story. Examples of questions:

1. Did Leah recently start attending Simon's school, or was it Abby?
2. How many people does Simon eat lunch with before Martin joins the table?
A) Six. B) Seven. C) Eight. D) Nine.
3. Is the following statement true or false – explain your answer: Martin blackmails Simon.
4. Is Simon scared of his and Blue's emails being leaked – if yes, why?
5. What does Simon actually know about Blue?

Why

Summarising through these questions is useful because one cannot remember all the details in a long text. Teachers must therefore make sure to include the most important details of the text in the questions they ask. The testing should not function as a collecting of facts, but show the learners' understanding and experiences of reading the text. An additional benefit of the activity is that summaries make learners turn to the text, in order to express their own interpretation about it in their own words (Drangeid, 2014, pp. 103-104).

The five questions represent all five forms of questions suggested by Richard A. Day and Jeongsuk Park (2005). The questions are ordered according to their level of difficulty – with 1 being the easiest and 5 the hardest to answer – and teachers should use their knowledge about their learners to consider who must answer all the questions and who must answer fewer, in order for the teaching to be adapted to each student's needs. By providing learners with a variety of well-designed comprehension questions, teachers help learners become interactive readers, that is, not passively reading the text, but actually using their schemata and skills to interact with the text and create meaning (Day & Park, 2005, p. 61). By working with these questions, and particularly question 4 and 5, the learners may get an idea of what it is like being a closeted queer person, and perhaps understand queer culture more – and thus develop their intercultural knowledge.

Furthermore, skills of interpreting and relating involve interpreting cultural aspects in a text and relating them to cultural aspects in one's own life (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12), hence this activity enables learners to develop skills of interpreting and relating.

Specific IC learning goals

- Get an idea of what it is like being a closeted queer person
- Get insight into queer culture

- Be able to relate cultural aspects in the novel with own cultural aspects

ACTIVITY 4

What

Describing the characters.

How

Activity 4a. From a list of adjectives, students choose which ones are the most appropriate for describing Simon versus Nick, and Leah versus Abby. Suggested adjectives: Masculine, feminine, introvert, extrovert, popular, talented dancer, talented singer. For example, Leah is more introverted and Abby more extroverted.

Activity 4b. Students write a short text about their favourite character in the story. They are allowed to write whatever they want, but encouraged to use the adjectives listed under activity 4a.

Activity 4c. The learners' answers are discussed in a plenary session.

Why

In connection with literature, *effere* means interpreting aspects of a text, such as the plot or character traits. *Aesthetic* reading, however, refers to the experience of reading, and what strategies that are used in the text to help readers create meaning from and within the text (Wiland, 2016, p. 17).

Firstly, activity 4a enables learners to show their efferent reading ability, that is, how well they have understood the characters in the text. Hopefully, learners are able to see that although Simon is homosexual and Nick is heterosexual, they both possess characteristics typically viewed as masculine and feminine in Norwegian society: For example, whereas Nick likes singing and is a quiet character (feminine), Simon is more extroverted and relatively tough-skinned (masculine); and while Nick is a football enthusiast (masculine), Simon acts and sings in the theatre (feminine). Furthermore, learners may also notice that even if Abby is an extroverted character and Leah is introverted, Simon appreciates them both for their individual features. What the learners may carry away from this exercise is that originality and being different is acceptable and should be praised, regardless of, for example, gender, sexuality, religious background, and

skin colour. The activity may thus help learners develop their intercultural attitudes towards diversity.

Secondly, activity 4b challenges learners to express how they experience the text, as the activity requires for them to explain why they find one character more likeable than others. In other words, this activity encourages aesthetic reading. Making learners aware of both efferent and aesthetic approaches to a novel may enable them to build reader confidence (Wiland, 2016, p. 22), which will be useful as they continue reading and later discuss the entire novel.

Finally, concerning activity 4c, the learners discuss their findings in connection with stereotypes, in plenary. One way of bringing the intercultural dimension into the classroom and help learners develop as intercultural speakers, is by helping them gain knowledge about how different cultural groups and identities interact, as well as to provide knowledge about the stereotypes that are generally given certain cultures (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12). One such stereotype is that homosexual boys are typically feminine. By highlighting and discussing Simon and Nick's characteristics, such stereotypes may be challenged. When discussing this topic, it is important for teachers to ensure that the discussion does not problematise femininity among homosexuals, but challenges generalisations and stereotypes. It would also be relevant to discuss that although both Simon and Ethan are homosexual, they are still quite different. Hence, through this activity, learners discuss stereotypes and negotiate cultural misunderstandings. By doing so, they may develop an understanding and respectful attitude towards people from different cultures, and view these people as complex human beings with multiple identities and an own individuality. In other words, since learners acquire new information about queer people and use this knowledge in conversation, the activity enables learners to develop their skills of discovery and interaction (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13).

Specific IC learning goals

- Be able to identify and acknowledge the differences between the novel's characters
- Be able to discuss stereotypes about queer culture in connection with how queer characters are presented in the novel, and determine stereotypes

ACTIVITY 5

What

Discussing whether or not learners predicted the story accurately.

How

After the learners have started reading the text, in this brief session they share whether or not their predictions about the story in activity 2 were accurate.

Why

Besides arousing excitement and motivation for the text, predictions can be useful later, perhaps especially when they are inaccurate. The readers can then turn back to the text to search for neglected tracks and evaluate why they predicted the story accurately or inaccurately. Thus, predictions become important for understanding (Drangeid, 2014, p. 103).

The predictions can be linked to IC if, for example, some learners predicted a heterosexual story. The IC component critical cultural awareness is about evaluating own (and others') cultural perspectives and practices (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). Therefore, by evaluating why their predictions were accurate or inaccurate based on their cultural knowledge – for example, because they have mostly been exposed to literature with heterosexual protagonists – they may develop their critical cultural awareness.

Specific IC learning goal

- Be able to evaluate why they made accurate or inaccurate predictions.

4.2.3 Post-reading activities

Post-reading activities ensure comprehension and a deeper analysis of the text. If arranged critically, these activities enable learners to see into others' minds, and not just recall what they memorised from the text. It is important that these activities do not just elicit comprehension drills, but enable learners to reflect upon what they have learned and interweave this new information with current knowledge (Toprak & Almacioğlu, 2009, pp. 23-24).

ACTIVITY 6

What

Discussing Internet usage, and booktalk vlog.

How

Activity 6a. The class discusses how the Internet impacts the story of the novel, and the importance of being respectful and acting cautiously online. The discussion will include acceptable ways of commenting online, such as encouraging, constructive and enriching comments vs. disrespectful, destructive and discouraging comments.

Activity 6b. Teachers help learners in making interpretations of the novel, to which learners respond through a booktalk and later upload online as a video log (vlog). In order to know the format of a booktalk and learn how such videos are typically edited with, for example, sound, cutting, and effects, the learners must first analyse booktalk vlogs online. To implement adapted teaching, teachers should consider the proficiency level of the individual learner, and only if appropriate, learners may be asked to distinguish between subjective and objective reviews.

In addition to expressing their overall impression of the novel, learners are organised into groups of four when working with the review. They decide who will focus either on the plot, character, themes, or the messages – so that the reviews combined form a comprehensive review. Before starting working on the chosen literary aspect, they brainstorm in groups, and share input on all four aspects. Furthermore, the group members responsible for thematising plot and characters have the advantage that they have already studied the same aspects briefly in the while-reading activities. One way of implementing adapted teaching would thus be for teachers to advise weak learners to work with plot and characters.

Learners should be encouraged to express themselves openly in their responses, and should be reminded that there is seldom one definite interpretation of a text; texts are usually ambiguous and their meanings are rarely attainable (Wiland, 2016, p. 37). Learners furthermore discuss the following questions in their booktalk:

1. How did the people who knew about Simon’s sexuality (family, friends, teachers) respond respectfully or disrespectfully?
2. Did someone treat Simon differently after finding out about his sexuality? If yes – who and how?
3. What do you think about Blue being Bram (a boy)?
4. Do you think Martin’s apology was sufficient, and that Simon was right to “forgive” him? Explain why you think or do not think so.

5. Do you think Martin blackmailing Simon was worse than Simon orchestrating the love lives of his friends? Explain why you think so, or why you do not think so.

Learners produce a manuscript for the booktalk on their computers. The group members record each other performing the manuscript using, for example, cell phones or web cameras. They then put together all group members' videos to form one complete review, and upload it to a video-sharing platform, such as YouTube, Vimeo, or any other platforms used on their school, which allows only classmates (in addition to the teacher) to view and comment on each other's videos. Afterwards, they comment on the video of at least one other group. Teachers must supervise the comments and make sure that no comments are disrespectful, but rather encouraging, constructive and enriching, as discussed in activity 6a.

Why

Lazar (1993) suggests there to be a follow-up written or oral activity after the learners have finished reading the text. She furthermore recommends an assignment where learners review the story they have read, and that teachers provide learners with questions that focus on controversial aspects of the novel for learners to discuss (Lazar, 1993, p. 86). In the Simon-project learners respond to the novel through an oral activity (6a) in the form of a discussion, and a written activity (6b) in the form of a booktalk.

The Internet has a central role in the novel, as, for example, it allows Martin to reveal Simon's sexuality to the public, and to do it anonymously. Therefore, in activity 6a, the learners will discuss how the Internet impacts the story, and discuss the importance of acting cautiously and respectfully online. Learning how to behave respectfully, and perhaps especially online where learners are exposed to cultural diversity regularly, may be readily connected with IC. Activity 6a is furthermore a beneficial pre-activity before learners view the Simon-film, where cyberbullying is a central theme.

In activity 6b, the learners respond to what they liked and disliked about the literary work, and discuss the questions presented above. It is important that teachers stress that learners should respond freely to the text, as this may promote personal growth and emotional engagement (Wiland, 2016, p. 9).

The reason to why the learners discuss all four aspects in groups before the group members start working individually on their chosen literary aspect, is that through such sharing of information, learners can provide each other with input that the others perhaps did not comprehend by themselves, or comprehended incorrectly. Such discussions can help learners go from determining specific facts, to exploring deeper features of the novel (Toprak & Almacioğlu, 2009, p. 24)

The activity requires reading skills and ICT skills, and since learners have to put together the book review within a certain time frame, and synchronise subtitles to the review, they must use their calculating skills as well. They practice their writing skills when producing the manuscript, and oral skills as they discuss the novel in groups and rehearse and listen to recordings of their oral presentations.

Through producing book reviews, one could say that the learners teach their audience about the book. In other words, they use their knowledge of the book and provide this information in an informative and educating manner through their booktalk. As reported by Wiland (2016), teaching is, according to numerous teachers, “the best way to learn something” (p. 15), which validates the quality of the activity.

Before learners start working individually, they brainstorm together in groups. The activity involves and requires discussing and sharing ideas in an openminded and respectful manner (such as the brainstorming activity in Activity 2), and therefore helps learners develop intercultural attitudes (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 11-12)

Furthermore, the first three questions the learners discuss in their booktalk help incorporate an intercultural dimension into the classroom. Firstly, when discussing question 1, learners may learn the difference between respectful and disrespectful behaviour and attitudes. Knowing about what respectful attitudes are, is useful for adopting intercultural attitudes, which involve open-mindedness and appreciation of differences. Secondly, through question 2, learners may understand how one’s perception of others may influence communication. The question is related to IC as the intercultural dimension is concerned with how social identities and perception of others influence communication (Byram et al., 2002, p. 14). Thirdly, question 3 allows learners to form an independent opinion about homosexuality, and hence challenges them to reflect over their opinion about queer culture. This involves making a critical evaluation of other cultures’

practices and own perspectives, and the activity may therefore help learners develop their critical cultural awareness.

This activity takes into consideration the characteristics of Net Geners in many ways. The booktalk vlog involves technology and creating video, which meets today's learners' characteristic as technology savvy. As mentioned above, learners prefer technology-based learning environments, where they can use their ICT-skills. Furthermore, the activity takes into account that Net Geners are visually literate as they are allowed to create videos, and uploading the videos online continues the fashion that these learners like contributing to the Internet. Finally, the activity supports the learners' need for speedy lessons, as the activity is hands-on, engaging, and allows for quick responses through commenting on each other's videos (Berk, 2009b, p. 9-13).

Specific IC learning goals

- Know how to behave respectfully on the Internet
- Be able to see the difference between respectful and disrespectful behaviour and attitudes
- Be able to understand how social identities and perception of others influence communication
- Be able to make a critical evaluation of own perspectives (about queer culture)

ACTIVITY 7

What

Lecture and roleplaying.

How

Teachers lecture about the lifestyles and norms that are current in queer culture. Thereafter, learners perform a roleplay. Byram et al. (2002) recommend an activity where some learners act as if they are visitors to the country in which the learners live (e.g. Japanese people visiting Norway). Other learners then act as themselves (i.e. Norwegian) as naturally and realistically as possible, and not as stereotypes portray them to foreigners. The activity requires that learners activate their knowledge about their own and other cultures (Byram et al., 2002, p. 14). The same activity can be applied to learners who then roleplay heterosexuals encountering queers, and vice

versa. Alternatively, learners can act out a scene from the novel (Köksal, 2004, p. 68), as long as it portrays an encounter between heterosexual culture and queer culture.

Why

Learners encounter the story first through reading the novel, as suggested by Margaret L. Zoreda and Javier Vivaldo-Lima (p. 24). The reason for this is that encountering the story for the first time through the novel stimulates the learners' imagination of characters and settings – which might be beneficial before carrying out a roleplaying activity. Before that, however, it is recommended providing learners with general information about some lifestyles and norms current in the target culture, and enabling learners to carry out a comparative analysis with their own culture (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 14-15). In this case, this involves lecturing about queer culture.

After providing the brief lecture, learners perform the roleplay. Through extensive reading of literature and roleplaying, a near immersion situation may be achieved in the ELT classroom (Wiland, 2016, p. 185). Roleplaying is one of the most commonly suggested teaching activities for developing IC in the literary assortment behind this thesis (Berk, 2009b; Byram et al., 2002; Köksal, 2004; Lazar, 1993; Norton, 2009; Wiland, 2016). One reason as to why teachers should incorporate roleplays, is to prepare learners for culture shock. For the sake of clarity, culture shock is not just something that can occur when western people encounter, for example, indigenous African people; it can also be experienced when heterosexual people encounter queer culture. Before encountering such situations, learners should be trained to decentre (Byram et al., 2002, p. 19).

Roleplay activities that help learners prepare for culture shock is a type of *experiential learning*, that is, according to Byram et al. (2002, p. 14), a method that effectively teaches learners self-awareness and understanding of other cultures. In other words, roleplaying lets learners reflect upon own and others' values, and helps them develop the ability to decentre – and thus promotes critical cultural awareness. What is important is that teachers who structure lessons with experiential learning must ensure that the culture shock is experienced as positive and constructive rather than overwhelming and intimidating, and help learners analyse their experiences and learn from their responses (Byram et al., 2002, p. 19). The benefit of such experiential activities are that learners become better prepared for communicating with people of

different cultures, as well as becoming more tolerant towards Otherness (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 14-15). One final IC component acquired through roleplaying is intercultural knowledge: The activity requires for learners to act naturally and realistically, and not as stereotypes portray certain cultural groups. Learners must therefore refrain from acting as queer people the way stereotypes portray them, but rather analyse and act out the characteristics they have learned about queer people from the novel. Also, the activity requires for learners to analyse how both heterosexual people and queer people are perceived, and according to Byram et al. (2002, p. 12), intercultural knowledge is also about how interlocutors are likely to perceive you.

Net Geners are hands-on, experiential learners who prefer working independently rather than being instructed or reading manuals (Berk, 2009b, p. 10). Because they prefer kinaesthetic learning³, roleplaying is a suitable activity for these learners. Net Geners furthermore prefer that roleplays give room for teamwork and collaboration. These learners are also very social and typically prefer working in teams with interpersonal interaction rather than working alone, and through roleplaying learners are enabled to develop their collective intelligence (Berk, 2009b, p. 12).

The learners have finished working with one medium and move on to the next section where they work with the Simon-film. Using technology such as films in the classroom is critical to connecting with Net Geners' culture (Berk, 2009b, p. 10). However, it would be insufficient to simply show films in ELT lessons; they must be accompanied by learning activities (Kabooha, 2016, p. 254). Accordingly, the film is accompanied with while- and post-viewing activities.

4.2.4. Pre-viewing activities

Pre-viewing activities are beneficial because they contribute to developing learners' comprehension strategies. The activities activate the learners' schemata before new input is introduced, and thus prepare learners for viewing a film (Stoller, 1991, in Köksal, 2004, p. 65) One may thus argue that the post-reading activities, in the Simon-project, function as pre-viewing

³ Kinaesthetic learning is learning through motion or physical activities as opposed to sedative learning such as teacher-centred lectures (Roell, 2017).

activities, as they help learners comprehend the story and activate their schemata. Due to the redundant nature of this function in both post-reading activities and pre-viewing activities, the pre-viewing activities are therefore superfluous.

4.2.5 While-viewing activity

The purpose of while-viewing activities is to check and deepen learners' understanding of a film (Roell, 2010, p. 5). If appropriate for the class level, teachers can use English subtitles when showing the film to enhance learning about vocabulary and idiomatic expressions (Zoreda & Vivaldo-Lima, 2008, p. 25).

ACTIVITY 8

What

Comparing heterosexual culture with queer culture.

How

Learners recognise differences between heterosexual culture and the queer culture displayed in the film. The film lasts for approximately 110 minutes and is divided into several instances: It is paused at specific times to let learners write down their impressions (on computers).

Why

Peter Voller and Stephen Widdows (1993) claim that viewing the entire film in one sitting makes it hard for learners to organise all important details, and breaking up films too often interrupts the flow and enjoyment of viewing the film. Optimally, films should be shown in chunks of approximately fifteen minutes, and be paused only when it is natural (Voller & Widdows, 1993, pp. 344, in Lialikhova, 2014, p. 2038). However, the learners in the Simon-project have already worked with the story quite comprehensively, including plot and characters, so focus on these aspects is deprioritised and the lesson plan does not break up the movie as often as suggested. Drawing on Freytag's pyramid of dramatic structure that includes the opening (exposition), rising action (and climax), and ending (denouement) (Wiland, 2016, p. 74), the film is paused and learners write down their impressions after the exposition (after the introduction of Simon's friends, family and lifestyle, and the conflict with Martin) and climax (after Simon has been outed, starts fighting with his friends, and "loses" Blue), as well as after the ending of the film

(after Simon reunites with his friends, people show him respect, and he finds out who Blue is), although this actually makes it a post-viewing activity rather than while-viewing activity.

The activity may increase learners' sociocultural awareness, as they compare cultural aspects in the film with "their own culture" (Roell, 2010, p. 6). However, this lesson plan does not take it for granted that all learners are heterosexual and does not just promote education *about* the Other. It is therefore important that the teacher emphasises that learners should compare queer cultural aspects in the film with heterosexual cultural aspects rather than "their own", to promote both of Kumashiro's (2000, p. 32) concepts, education about the Other and for the Other.

Distinguishing traits from queer culture may provide learners with intercultural knowledge, as they learn the norms and ways of socialising among queer people. Since they also compare cultures, they develop their skills of interpreting and relating as they compare ideas and events from different cultures in an objective manner, in order to understand how intercultural misunderstandings might emerge and be solved. Finally, the learners evaluate both cultures critically, and do a critical comparison of them, and thereby develop the IC component of critical cultural awareness (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 12-13).

One of the reasons for why the lesson plan does not include comprehensive while-reading and -viewing activities, which would require pausing the reading- and viewing-process more frequently, is to allow the learners to *appropriate* the texts. Appropriating a text is the process of allowing readers/viewers to encounter texts in an honest and sincere manner, because this engenders a need for them to express their experiences with their classmates. Verbal expression is furthermore closely related to the process of shaping one's identity (Wiland, 2016, p. 23).

4.2.6 Post-viewing activities

Post-viewing activities should be arranged because they encourage and stimulate the knowledge learners have acquired from a film, and let them produce a response orally or in writing (Köksal, 2004, p. 66). Some suggested activities are film summaries, comparisons and discussions (Stoller, 1992, pp. 32-33). It is also suggested by Köksal (2004) to "[a]sk students to compare and discuss the main differences between the film version and the actual written text in terms of the story line, plot, characterisation, viewpoint, setting, and tension" (p. 68). I have decided to include an analysis and comparison activity, as well as a discussion activity as post-viewing activities.

ACTIVITY 9

What

Discussing the story and its themes.

How

For this activity, learners remove all tables from the middle of the classroom if possible and place their chairs in a circle. Sitting in the circle they express themselves freely about what they think about the story and its themes. The discussion is led by the teacher, who functions as “chairperson”, or mediator, and brings forward some questions suggested by Köksal (2004):

- 1) “How many stories are there in the film? What about the novel?”
- 2) How much do you think is fact and how much is fiction?
- 3) What are the main themes in the film? Is there any message that the narrator is trying to give?” (p. 68).

As chairperson it is important for the teacher to only challenge learners’ ideas, not the learners themselves (Byram et al., 2002, p. 27)

When implementing a discussion in the classroom, especially one including sensitive and controversial themes such as sexuality, it is crucial to establish some procedural ground rules in advance. As advised by Byram et al. (2002, p. 25), the learners shall:

- listen to each other and wait on their turn to speak,
- respect the chairman (teacher) throughout the discussion,
- use polite language even when they get eager or provoked,
- not make discriminatory remarks or expressions such as racist, sexist or homophobic comments,
- describe and discuss people portrayed in novels and films in a respectful manner,
- maintain a respectful tone throughout the discussion, and
- challenge generalisations and stereotypes.

Why

As stated in the Overall Part, the school is to provide a learning environment that encourages learners to express their thoughts and experiences, and listen to the ideas and knowledge of others (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 9). The Simon-project involves this activity.

The ground rules suggested by Byram et al. (2002) are important in order to make sure that the discussion is executed in a balanced and peaceful manner without anyone ending up offended or hurt. This requires careful classroom management from the teacher to ensure that conflicts of views and sharing perspectives become productive and educational (Byram et al., 2002, p. 27). It is particularly the last rule – that learners shall challenge generalisations and stereotypes – that is important for developing IC (Byram et al., 2002, p. 25). By doing so, learners develop their intercultural knowledge by learning about stereotypical views of own and other cultures, as well as developing their skills of discovery and interaction by using knowledge about cultures and cultural practices in communication (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 12-13).

The discussion activity allows learners to explore and express their feelings and thoughts. This is important when dealing with stereotypes, generalisations and prejudices, which are all based on feelings and not reason (Byram et al., 2002, p. 27). Discussion is also one of the activities that enables learners to change their envisionments (i.e. world of understanding) (Langer, 2011, p. 11). When interacting with others and challenging their own envisionments, learners explore new horizons and possibilities, and increase their sensitivity to and understanding of the complexity in other people's lives. Since critical cultural awareness involves evaluating and developing a critical perspective on own culture (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13), one may argue that this activity enables learners to develop the IC component.

Except for the IC outcome of the activity, discussing is a very suitable exercise for Net Geners. Firstly, due to lots of exposure to the cultural diversity on the Internet, Net Geners are typically openminded towards and support multiculturalism, sexual diversity, and gay rights. Secondly, Net Geners are generally emotionally open and like expressing their opinions to their classmates (Berk, 2009b, p. 12).

ACTIVITY 10

What

Film review.

How

Learners write film reviews (on computers) as if they were writing for a well-known magazine that features film reviews. They summarise and express their responses to the film – especially what they liked and disliked about it. The review also contains a comparison of narration, expression level and thematics between the novel and film, including their consideration of which scenes or passages from the texts they liked best – and why. As suggested by Engelstad (2013, p. 97), learners also answer the following questions: Did the film adapt difficult passages well? Does the film shed new light over the story? Will the film reach a wider audience than the book did alone? And, most importantly, has it become a good movie? Finally, they publish their reviews online.

In order to adapt the teaching according to proficiency level, learners who find writing activities like this challenging can do tasks that require kinaesthetic skills. Some suggestions by Köksal (2004, p. 66) are making posters or drawing characters from the story. These craftworks can be used as illustrations in the other learners' reviews.

Why

It has been suggested that learners write a review of films and share their responses online, and in order to do so, they have to find and read similar reviews online (Köksal, 2004, p. 68). Moreover, Köksal (2004) suggests for learners to compare novel and film (p. 66), and to summarise the story because it helps learners in developing cognitive strategies (Köksal, 2004, p. 68). Another benefit of such an activity is that it enables learners to practice their written proficiency in a natural manner (Verner, No date). The writing task can furthermore enhance learners' synthesis skills, analysing skills and problem solving skills (Norton, 2009, p. 9).

When working with adapted films in particular, it can be useful to ask learners to consider which scenes from the movie or passages from the book they remember best, and determine why it is so. What is it about these scenes or passages that made such an impression, and how do the two texts treat these events differently? Was the event equally memorable in both texts? (Engelstad, 2013, pp. 95-96).

Writing the reviews on a word-processing computer program and publishing them online, promotes ICT-skills. This is in accordance with Berk's (2009b, pp. 9-13) idea that Net Geners are both technology savvy, contribute to the Internet, and prefer typing on computers. The learners must also find similar magazine reviews online, meaning they have to use search engines to find relevant material. And finally, today's learners are likely to prefer sharing their personal opinions about the film.

Since the learners consider which scenes they liked best – and why, they must make a critical evaluation of their own perspectives. Such evaluations may help them get a better understanding of their own values. For example, if learners find that they favour scenes about heterosexual characters and dislike scenes that involve homosexuality, they may become aware of their own values and attitudes. In other words, the activity enables learners to develop critical cultural awareness (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). Further, the learners answer whether the film sheds new light over the story. As mentioned above, one new element in the film is the character Ethan, who adds a new dimension to the film. If learners notice elements like this when working with the activity, they may gain intercultural knowledge, as they develop knowledge about social processes and ways of interacting in the (queer) culture (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12).

Specific IC learning goals

- Be able to make critical evaluation of own perspectives
- Be able to find elements in the film that can help develop intercultural knowledge

ACTIVITY 11

What

Guest speaker.

How

A guest speaker is invited to the school, and learners get the chance to interact with and learn from a person representing the queer culture. Learners have the opportunity to ask the representative questions, as suggested by Byram et al. (2002, p. 16), particularly about how s/he perceives heterosexual culture in contrast to queer culture, and why s/he has this perception.

Why

Although Net Geners have quite good schemata about queer culture (Berk, 2009b, p. 12), they may not have met a queer person in real life before. One way of realising this is by inviting a guest speaker from Restart. Restart is a school project run by the Norwegian organisation Queer Youth (Skeiv Ungdom). This school project visits schools for free in order to communicate with and give lectures to learners in lower secondary and upper secondary school. The guest speaker provides a lecture about gender, sexuality, and norm criticism, and arranges activities and conversations where learners are able to express themselves freely and ask questions that may have arisen throughout the Simon-project. What is important when learners ask questions is not just asking the representative about specific facts about queer culture and comparisons between heterosexual and queer culture, but to ask about how the representative experiences heterosexual culture and why s/he has this perception. By doing so, learners may come to view the world differently, or as Byram et al. (2002) note “learners can become aware of the power of perceptions” (p. 16).

Nevertheless, it is important to make clear to the learners that although the guest speaker represents queer culture, what s/he answers to their questions is not necessarily generalisable, as s/he does not know intuitively the whole of queer culture, as there are multiple cultures within the queer culture (Byram et al., 2002, p. 17). However, despite the fact that the guest speaker’s information may not be generalisable, one may argue that what s/he presents is authentic material. Since intercultural knowledge involves encountering authentic material about other culture’s practices and about how social groups and identities function (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12), learners may develop intercultural knowledge as they encounter the guest speaker from Restart. Lastly, since learners talk with the guest speaker about how s/he interprets heterosexual culture and ways of life of queer people, learners make comparisons of different sexual cultures. This serves to develop the IC component critical cultural awareness (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13).

Specific IC learning goals

- Learn authentic material from guest speaker
- Be able to discuss stereotypes and perceptions of heterosexual culture in contrast to queer culture, with guest speaker and others

4.3. Overview of lesson plan

In summary, this is what the lesson plan looks like:

When	What
Week 1	1. Understanding theme (sexual diversity) and relevant vocabulary. 2. Predictions and discussion. <i>Start reading.</i> 3. Understanding the plot.
Week 2	<i>Continue reading.</i> 4. Describing the characters.
Week 3	<i>Finish reading.</i> 5. Discussing whether or not learners predicted the story accurately.
Week 4	6. Discussing Internet usage, and booktalk vlog.
Week 5	7. Lecture and roleplaying.
Week 6	8. (<i>Viewing film while</i>) Comparing heterosexual culture with queer culture. 9. Discussing the story and themes in it.
Week 7	10. Film review. 11. Guest speaker.

One of the greatest challenges about a film and literature project is that it is quite time-consuming. Being able to fully experience a text, perceiving both apparent and “hidden” details through slow reading, and writing quality personal responses to texts requires time – and time is a rare commodity in the ELT classroom (Wiland, 2016, p. 27). However, since teachers cannot allocate more hours per week, the entire Simon-project takes approximately seven weeks. One may ask whether it would be a challenge to keep the learners’ motivation for such a long period of time. However, due to the variety of the project – that it includes media that learners prefer working with and different types of activities that are designed to meet the learners’ interests and needs – they may find the project interesting and exciting rather than boring, something they would possibly fail to do if teachers did not connect with their culture (Berk, 2009b, p. 13). Using time in the classroom on the Simon-project as an alternative to textbooks is time well spent, as the design of the project, in addition to promoting IC, allows for meeting a number of other demands put forward in official steering documents. As Berk (2009b, p. 17) argues, teacher-instructed lectures and textbook readings are inefficient with today’s learners. Instead, teachers should arrange lessons where they incorporate a variety of strategies and mix them, particularly

lessons that involve keywords such as digital, visual, hands-on, multimedia, interactive, collaborative, and connected. Moreover, Bertelsmann Stiftung and Fondazione Cariplo (2008, p. 10) argue that since IC is such a comprehensive competence that involves more than just language learning, it would not be unreasonable to make such a project interdisciplinary. For example, it could be combined with any other school subject in lower secondary that concentrates on culture (e.g. social studies or knowledge of Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of life and ethics) or sexuality (e.g. social studies or natural science).

Conclusion

It is important today to enable learners to become citizens of a multicultural world, and one may therefore proclaim that English classrooms should incorporate an intercultural dimension. In accordance with this, my thesis has suggested a lesson plan called the Simon-project. The lesson plan uses the novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) and the film adaptation *Love, Simon* (2018), accompanied with a variety of activities, in order to promote IC and enable learners to become intercultural speakers. More precisely, the Simon-project helps learners develop IC – ultimately to promote open-mindedness and positive attitudes towards sexual diversity.

The research question of the study asked to what extent the lesson plan including the selected material can enable learners to become interculturally competent in a sexually diverse world; that is, whether the Simon-novel and -film can help learners develop the five intercultural components and thus become better prepared to encounter and/or embrace queer culture. As I have shown, through implementing the variety of activities, the lesson plan ensures that learners may acquire all five IC components:

Intercultural attitudes: Reading the novel, predicting the continuation of the story and discussing each other's ideas in respectful and openminded manner, distinguishing between respectful and disrespectful behaviour and attitudes, and comparing characters and possibly realise that diversity is positive (activities 2, 4 and 6).

Intercultural knowledge: Encountering authentic material, learning about and analysing queer people's norms and ways of life and interaction, and discussing and challenging generalisations and stereotypes about queer culture in class (activities 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11).

Skills of discovery and interaction: Using knowledge about queer culture and practices when communicating (activity 9)

Skills of interpreting and relating: Comparing ideas and events between heterosexual and queer culture, and discussing stereotypes and negotiating cultural misunderstandings concerning queer culture (activities 3, 4 and 8).

Critical cultural awareness: Making critical evaluations of and comparisons between own and other's perspectives and practices, and listening to and discussing with guest speaker about his or her perceptions of heterosexual culture in contrast with queer culture (activities 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9).

Even though not all activities address sexual diversity explicitly, most activities may help learners become more openminded towards Otherness in general. More precisely, learners become intercultural speakers as teachers help them develop more respectful and openminded attitudes towards unfamiliar cultural traits, acquire intercultural knowledge about Otherness and the Others' ways of life and communicating, strengthen their skills to interpret and interact well, and become more critically aware of their own and others' cultures and cultural determinants. Becoming more openminded towards Otherness evidently also implies becoming more openminded towards sexual diversity.

The Simon-project adapts to learners' proficiency level by, for example, offering group tasks of different difficulty and allowing kinaesthetic learners to make craftwork instead of doing a writing task. Moreover, the project adapts to learners' characteristics by recognising them as Net Geners and taking into consideration eleven identifying needs and habits described by Berk (2009b).

The lesson plan promotes anti-oppressive education by including education about the Other and education for the Other. Concerning education about the Other, the Simon-project challenges stereotypes, prejudices, generalisations, and general misinterpretations, and the material provided through the novel, film and guest speaker may be viewed as accurate or authentic. The project includes education for the Other through showing that the school is affirming of the Other and Otherness, by providing resources (i.e. literature and film) that enable queer people to challenge oppression themselves, and by offering queer learners to talk with understanding people (e.g. the guest speaker) (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 28). By incorporating anti-oppressive education, teachers may help in providing a learning environment that promotes safety and contentment, as required in the Overall Part and the Quality Framework.

As mentioned initially, the future requires as a key qualification "the ability to deal constructively on an interpersonal level with cultural diversity and a multitude of attitudes, values, norms, belief systems and ways of life" (Bertelsmann Stiftung & Fondazione Cariplo, 2008, p. 3). It is therefore fortunate that the English subject today includes more than just language learning.

Today, the English subject also enables learners to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, to develop good attitudes and comprehensive intercultural knowledge, as well as skills and reflections to better understand own and other cultures. In other words, the English subject today enables learners to become citizens of a multicultural world. As I have shown in this thesis, the Simon-project may fill a void in the Norwegian ELT classroom, and learners may, through it, be better prepared to become citizens of a sexually diverse world as well.

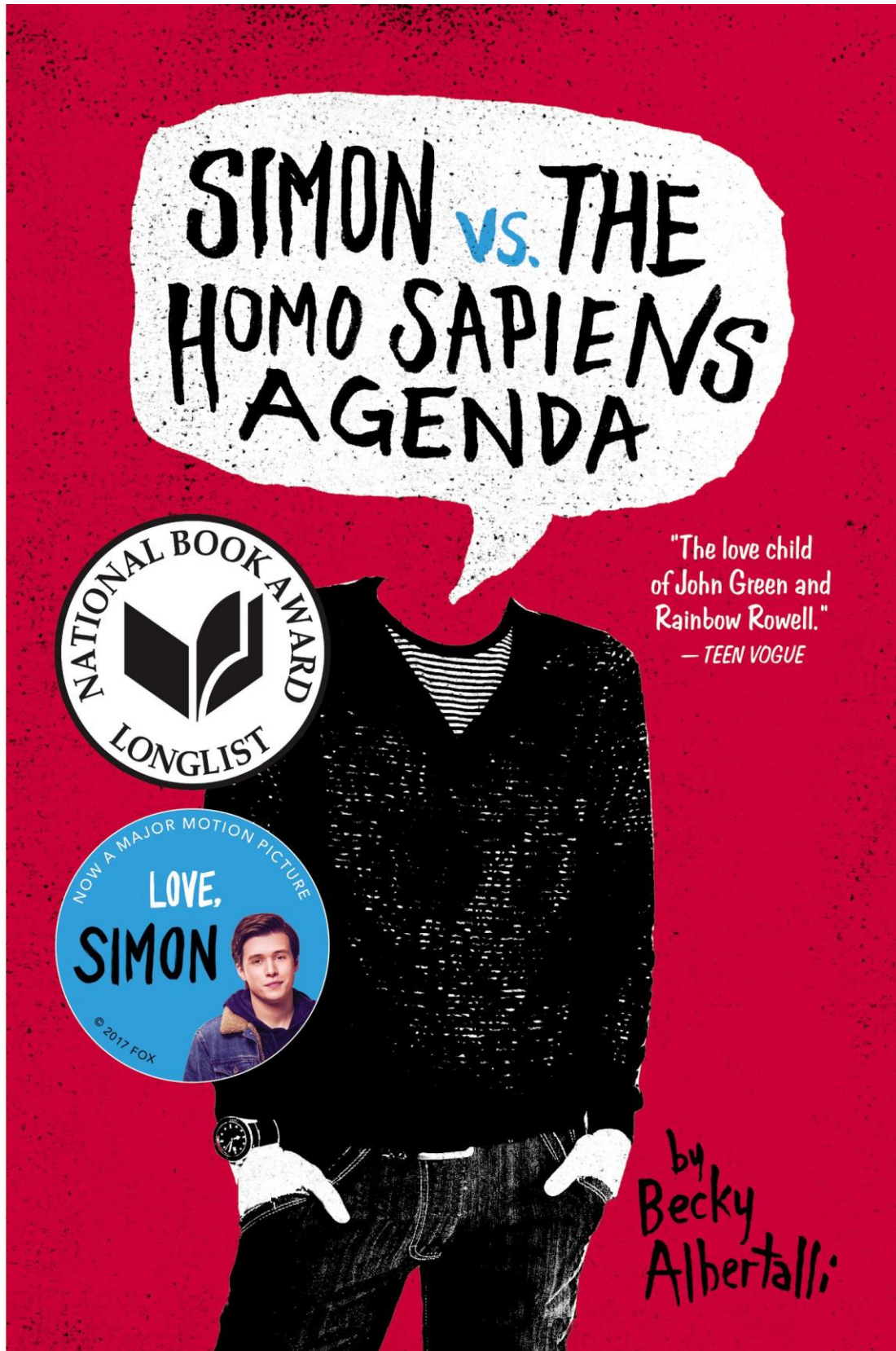
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Sixteen-year-old and not-so-openly gay Simon Spier prefers to save his drama for the school musical. But when an email falls into the wrong hands, his secret is at risk of being thrust into the spotlight. Now Simon is actually being blackmailed: If he doesn't play wingman for class clown Martin, his sexual identity will become everyone's business. Worse, the privacy of Blue, the pen name of the boy he's been emailing with, will be jeopardized.

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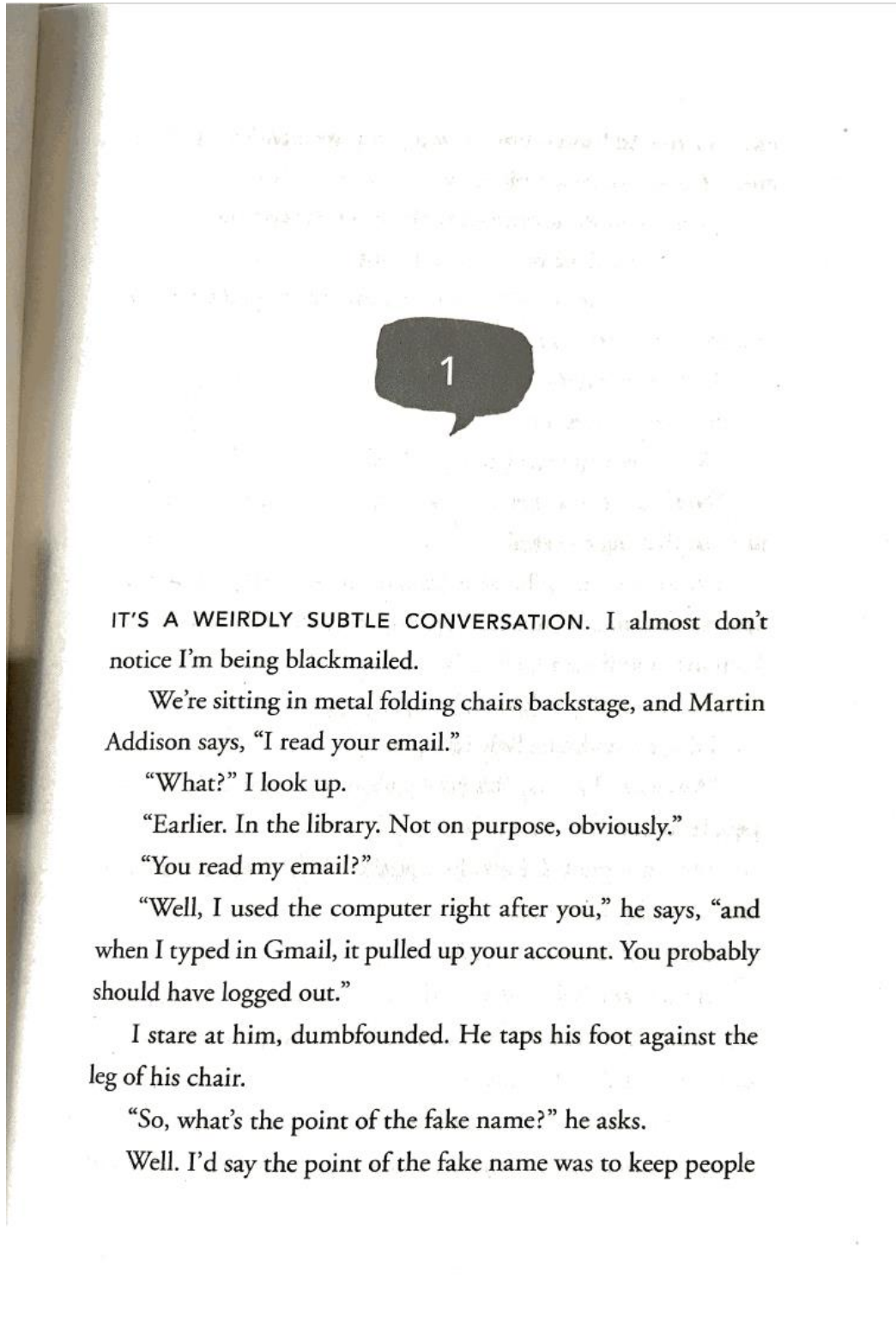
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ISBN 978-0-06-234868-5



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Appendix B



IT'S A WEIRDLY SUBTLE CONVERSATION. I almost don't notice I'm being blackmailed.

We're sitting in metal folding chairs backstage, and Martin Addison says, "I read your email."

"What?" I look up.

"Earlier. In the library. Not on purpose, obviously."

"You read my email?"

"Well, I used the computer right after you," he says, "and when I typed in Gmail, it pulled up your account. You probably should have logged out."

I stare at him, dumbfounded. He taps his foot against the leg of his chair.

"So, what's the point of the fake name?" he asks.

Well. I'd say the point of the fake name was to keep people

like Martin Addison from knowing my secret identity. So I guess that worked out brilliantly.

I guess he must have seen me sitting at the computer.

And I guess I'm a monumental idiot.

He actually smiles. "Anyway, I thought it might interest you that my brother is gay."

"Um. Not really."

He looks at me.

"What are you trying to say?" I ask.

"Nothing. Look, Spier, I don't have a problem with it. It's just not that big of a deal."

Except it's a little bit of a disaster, actually. Or possibly an epic fuckstorm of a disaster, depending on whether Martin can keep his mouth shut.

"This is really awkward," Martin says.

I don't even know how to reply.

"Anyway," he says, "it's pretty obvious that you don't want people to know."