CHAPTER 8

# Promoting 21ˢᵗ Century Skills through Classroom Encounters with English Language Literature in Norway: Theoretical and Practical Considerations

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**Abstract:** The present chapter explores the affordances of literature as an educational medium in the School of the Future, more specifically in relation to the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Norway. As new educational needs have emerged in response to the demands of the rapidly changing workplace and societies of our contemporary world, the role of literature in today's language classroom may seem somewhat precarious. The chapter therefore considers what 21ˢᵗ century skills like cross-cultural communication, in-depth learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, collaboration, and multiliteracies may entail in a context of literary reading. First, it gives an overview of how notions of 21ˢᵗ century skills and the encounter with English language texts feature in the current Norwegian National Curriculum. Next, the Model of the Intercultural Reader (MIR) (Hoff, 2016) is proposed as a viable theoretical framework for developing such skills through reading and working with literary texts in the EFL classroom. Practical implications are considered, and both strengths and limitations of the model are addressed. By concretising the theoretical and practical links between the MIR and the concept of 21ˢᵗ century skills, the chapter expounds upon previous discussions of the model and thereby provides further insight into its relevance as a pedagogical tool. Moreover, the chapter illuminates why literature still can and should play an important part in the present-day teaching and learning of English.

# Introduction[1]

A question which has been sought answered by scholars from diverse areas of educational research in the post-modern era, is how the aims and methods of education can be redefined in order to foster pupils' ability to handle the challenges and opportunities of our contemporary world (Hoff, 2019). The societies we live in today are very different from what they were no more than two decades ago, in large part due to fast-paced technological developments as well as processes of globalisation and mobility. These changes have affected our daily lives both at home and at work, perhaps most acutely in terms of how we interact with other people. For example, as an ever-expanding array of digital platforms have facilitated connections which were previously unaccessible (Thorne, 2010), meaning is increasingly communicated through the combination of different semiotic modes (Kress, 2010). Furthermore, intercultural encounters have become a ubiquitous part of our everyday reality, yet such encounters are frequently fraught with tension due to the unpredictable nature of 21st century communication as well as increased levels of racism and extremism in society (Council of Europe, 2010, 2016; Stadler, 2020). In other words, today's interconnected, pluralistic world prompts us to deal with conflict and ambiguity, challenging our ability to handle complex predicaments in an informed as well as ingenious manner. From an educational perspective, these developments make it pertinent to reconsider the types of teaching materials that are brought into the classroom, the topics that are addressed, and the ways in which pupils are encouraged to learn (Burbules, 2009; Eisner, 2004; Ludvigsen et al., 2015).

Against this background, the present chapter discusses the role of literary texts in today's language classroom, specifically in the context of teaching and learning English in Norway. Whilst reading fiction has traditionally been a central activity in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom (Fenner, 2020a), the academic relevance of this type of text has also been questioned in light of current and future educational needs (Habegger-Conti, 2015). In consideration of such matters,

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1    The introduction builds on ideas first expressed in the opening segment of Part I of my PhD thesis (Hoff, 2019).

the present chapter posits that pedagogical approaches to literature can contribute to promoting so-called "21$^{st}$ century skills" (e.g., Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Chu et al., 2017; Pellegrino, 2017). First, the chapter gives an overview of how notions of 21$^{st}$ century skills and literary reading feature in curricular guidelines. Next, the Model of the Intercultural Reader (MIR) (Hoff, 2016) is proposed as a viable pedagogical tool for developing these skills through reading and working with English language literature in an educational context. Whereas links between the MIR and the concept of 21$^{st}$ century skills have previously been alluded to (Hoff, 2019), what this kind of interconnection entails at a theoretical and practical level remains to be concretised and spelled out in more detail. By elaborating on such aspects, the aims of the chapter are to provide new insight into the affordances of the MIR as a pedagogical tool and, more importantly, to illuminate why literature still can and should play an important part in the teaching and learning of English within the School of the Future. The central questions which will be explored are: What do 21$^{st}$ century skills entail in a context of literary reading, and how may MIR-based approaches to literature in Norwegian EFL classrooms potentially contribute to the development of such skills?

## Background

## 21$^{st}$ century skills and English literature in the Norwegian National Curriculum

The term *21$^{st}$ century skills*, which emerged as a popular phrase in media, politics and academia worldwide around the turn of the millennium, refers to a set of skills which have been deemed critically important in order to prepare young individuals for the demands of the rapidly changing workplace and society of the 21$^{st}$ century (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Pellegrino, 2017). Accordingly, the theoretical and practical implications of the term have, unsurprisingly, become a key concern for educators. A number of global organisations and networks have set out to specify what these skills are and develop frameworks for their implementation in educational settings. While these frameworks differ across international contexts, they all stress the need for pedagogical approaches which

allow for processes of *in-depth learning, cross-cultural communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving,* and *innovation* as well as the development of a *comprehensive set of literacies* (see Chu et al., 2017). In a Norwegian context, the NOU report *The School of the Future* (Ludvigsen et al., 2015) recommended similar areas of competence which were to be given emphasis across all subjects and levels of education, resulting in the implementation of a new National Curriculum, *The Knowledge Promotion 2020* (LK20), in 2020.

The notion of 21st century skills is reflected both in the Norwegian Core Curriculum, which describes the overarching aims and values of education, and in the subject-specific curricula. According to the Core Curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017), promoting in-depth learning involves giving pupils varied tasks and opportunities to participate in activities of increasing complexity, "so that over time the pupils will be able to master various types of challenges" across familiar as well as unfamiliar contexts (p. 12). In contrast to surface learning, which focuses on the memorisation of facts and procedures (see Sawyer, 2008), in-depth learning requires an inquiry-based approach, which means that pupils must be given opportunities to be creative, inquisitive and innovative (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 7). This type of learning also necessitates critical thinking, which is described in the Core Curriculum as the ability to scrutinise established ideas in order to develop new insights, to assess different sources of knowledge in an analytical manner and to acknowledge that one's own point of view may be incomplete or even inaccurate (p. 7). Opening up for dialogue in the classroom may be important where the latter issue is concerned, as this alone will prompt pupils to engage with, and develop a stance towards, a variety of opinions and ideas. Indeed, the Core Curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017) presents communication and collaboration as aspects of social learning that can play a crucial role in helping pupils to deal with conflict and disagreement in a constructive manner (p. 11), thus echoing Iversen's (2014) notion of the classroom as a "community of disagreement."[2] Such

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2    My translation of the original term *"uenighetsfellesskap"* in Norwegian.

dialogical learning processes are also relevant in relation to the interdisciplinary topic *Democracy and Citizenship*, which involves enabling pupils to become active and responsible members of a democratic society (p. 9). In the English subject curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019), this interdisciplinary topic specifically pertains to democratic citizenship in a global perspective, and, accordingly, the intercultural dimension of language learning is portrayed as a key factor. Learning English, it is claimed, involves developing an understanding of the fact that individuals' perspectives are "culture dependent" (p. 3). As such, the curriculum reflects the view that the EFL classroom may be a particularly relevant arena for intercultural learning due to the fact that it "has the experience of otherness at the centre of its concern, [requiring] learners to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar experience through the medium of another language" (Byram, 2021, p. 5; also see Lund, 2020). Moreover, LK20 acknowledges that intercultural understanding is not only integral to pupils' ability to communicate effectively in English with other individuals; it may also contribute to expanding their repertoire for interpreting themselves and people around the world and expand their interest for interacting with others in an attentive and non-prejudiced manner (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3). In other words, the intercultural dimension of the English subject is closely linked to the overarching *Bildung* aims of education, which are based on the premise that education is not only as a matter of promoting testable knowledge and skills but also of helping pupils to develop at a personal and cultural level (Fenner, 2020b; Hoff, 2019).

The intercultural dimension of the English subject is further specified in connection with the core element *Working with texts in English*, which entails "reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing" English language texts in order to develop "intercultural competence" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3). While the curriculum does not provide an explicit definition of this term, it is linked to the ability to "deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" and seeing one's own and others' identities in a "multilingual and multicultural context" (p. 3). Accordingly, the curriculum not only reflects a postmodern understanding of culture and identity

as fluid and multifaceted concepts; it also posits that encounters with English language texts may be integral to promoting pupils' ability to handle the complexities which govern intercultural communication processes in our era. Indeed, whereas the ability to participate successfully in intercultural encounters was previously regarded as a matter of negotiating between two disparate cultural points of view (typically associated with nationality and language), this is today becoming increasingly perceived as a more convoluted and challenging undertaking (Holliday, 2011). Such a view is based on the recognition that people's identities may dwell in more than one language and culture, as well as the fact that our membership in a variety of groups and communities prompts us all to move in and out of multiple roles according to situation and context on a daily basis (Council of Europe, 2018; Dypedahl & Lund, 2020; Illmann & Nynäs, 2017).

The notion of multiliteracies, i.e., the ability to interpret and navigate different sign systems and media (The New London Group, 1996), is also highlighted in connection with pupils' intercultural encounter with English language texts. This is, for example, evident through the curriculum's condition that the concept of "text" be understood in a broad sense, encompassing "spoken and written, printed and digital, graphic and artistic, formal and informal, fictional and factual, contemporary and historical" forms of cultural expression (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3). Furthermore, by noting that texts can combine different meaning-bearing elements such as "writing, pictures, audio, drawings, graphs, numbers and other forms of expression" (p. 3), the English subject curriculum draws attention to the concept of multimodality and the fact that texts can convey meaning through other semiotic modes than printed words on a page (see Kress, 2010; Skulstad, 2020b).

It should, however, be noted that many of the 21st century skills which can be identified in LK20 are "not new, just newly important" (Silva, 2009, p. 631). For instance, because the *Bildung* tradition has had considerable impact on educational thought in the Scandinavian countries (Hoff, 2019), notions of self-expression, critical thinking, and intercultural and

democratic citizenship have, in different ways and to varying degrees, also permeated previous curricula for the subject of English (see Fenner, 2020b). Similarly, Norwegian curricular guidelines have been based on a communicative and socio-cultural view of language learning for decades (Skulstad, 2020a), which means that dialogue and collaboration are likely to be familiar modes of interaction in English classrooms across the country. What is new in the recently implemented national curriculum, however, is the central and explicit role these so-called 21st century skills have now been given across all levels and subjects of education.

How, then, does literary reading fit into this picture? In the curriculum which preceded LK20, it was noted that English language literary texts carry a potential to provide "a deeper understanding of others and of oneself" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2006/2013, p. 2). Since the encounter between Self and Other[3] lies at the core of the concept of intercultural competence (Bohlin, 2013), it can be argued that literature was here singled out as a particularly valuable type of text as regards the development of pupils' intercultural perspectives. Accordingly, LK20's predecessor reflected a tenet which was widely accepted in the research on literature and culture pedagogy at the time, namely the idea that FL literature represents "the personal voice of a culture" (Fenner, 2001, p. 16). Echoing Bakhtin's (2006) concepts of *heteroglossia* and *polyphony*, scholars have in more recent years also acknowledged the multivocality of this type of text (Greek, 2008). Moreover, theoretical research has proposed that readers' encounters with literary characters whose values and experiences differ from their own give them the opportunity both to identify and empathise with these characters and to relativise their own perspectives (Bredella, 2006; Kramsch, 1993; Matos, 2005). Indeed, building on the premise that literary reading is a dialogical process (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1994), engaging with FL literature can be understood as a unique form of intercultural communication (Hoff, 2016).

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3   These are philosophical terms used in *Bildung* theories by e.g., Levinas (2003) and Ricoeur (1992).

Compared to its predecessor, the current English subject curriculum presents the role of literature in more ambiguous terms. Whilst working with *text* is still linked to notions of interculturality in the curricular guidelines (see Dypedahl, 2020), literature is no longer given an elevated status in this connection; it is simply mentioned as one among a wide range of different types of text to which pupils should be exposed (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3). A potential practical consequence of this shift is that literature might also be *treated* like any other text in the English classroom, which would mean that its unique qualities as an aesthetic form of cultural expression are not properly acknowledged and explored (cf. Lütge, 2012; Paran, 2010; Pulverness, 2014). Furthermore, research indicates that young individuals are increasingly reluctant to read literature, particularly longer texts, partly due to their perception of this type of text as an outdated and old-fashioned medium (Habegger-Conti, 2015). This view appears to be based on an understanding of literature as a primarily script-based medium. However, it is important to note that the concept of a literary text is today widely recognised to include a range of multimodal media like comics, graphic novels, songs, TV series, films, and even certain types of interactive video games (Abrams & Harpham, 2013; Schallegger, 2015). Indeed, given the explicit references to different types of digital and multimodal texts in LK20, such forms of literature are likely to be given a more prominent position in the contemporary English classroom, perhaps even to the point that some teachers might question the legitimacy of the traditional, script-based literary text in this context.

The author of the present chapter does not adhere to the view that "traditional" literature no longer carries any educational relevance, but acknowledges the pedagogical possibilities associated with expanding one's idea of what a literary text is and can be. As will be elaborated upon in the following sections, reading and working with literary texts – of all genres, media and modalities – in the English classroom can play a major part in developing pupils' 21st century skills.

# Rationale for the choice of theoretical construct

Whether pupils' encounter with English literature will involve such learning processes as described above is dependent upon *how* they are encouraged to engage with text. An important question for teachers is thus what the concept of 21st century skills entails in a context of literary reading. Whilst there is widespread agreement about the nature and content of these skills at a general level (Chu et al., 2017), it must also be noted that there are local and contextual variations and that stakeholders do not necessarily have a common understanding of what sort of teaching materials and pedagogical approaches the development of such skills requires (see Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Accordingly, it is highly relevant to examine how 21st century skills and literary reading are interrelated at a theoretical and practical level.

Since the present chapter explores this matter from the perspective of EFL education in Norway, the curricular aims which have been highlighted above provide a contextual framework for the subsequent discussion. Given the fact that LK20 explicitly links the teaching of English language texts to intercultural learning aims, a theoretical construct which takes into account the intercultural dimension of text interpretation was chosen as the object of scrutiny. In this regard, the rationale for selecting the MIR among a number of relevant descriptive and prescriptive reading models (e.g., Burwitz-Melzer, 2007; Porto, 2013; Schat et al., 2021) is that previous research (Hoff, 2019) has pointed to parallels between this model and the concept of 21st century skills, but there is a need to clarify what these correlations encompass and which implications they may have for pedagogical practice.

First presented in Hoff (2016), the MIR depicts text interpretation as a dialogical, critical, and multifaceted undertaking in which literary analysis and the consideration of intercultural issues are two sides of the same coin. Reflecting the continuous interplay between different voices in discourse and society (see Dervin, 2016; Kramsch, 2011; cf. Bakhtin, 2006), the model illustrates how the reading process may operate at three interlinked levels of communication that draw into play the multiple
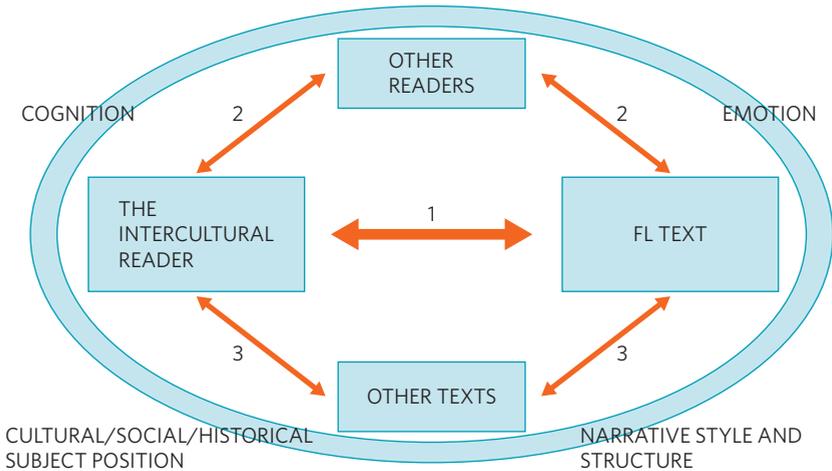
**Figure 1.** The Model of the Intercultural Reader (adapted from Hoff, 2016)

voices of the narrative FL text itself, other readers and other texts (see Figure 1 above).

**Level 1** of the MIR involves the competent intercultural reader's engagement with the literary voices inherent in the FL text, both those that are accessible at the surface of the text, like the protagonist and other characters, and more abstract voices that can only be accessed through a process of analytical interpretation, like the narrator, implied author, and implied reader.[4] **Level 2** signifies how other *readers* from a variety of contexts may be drawn into the interpretation process. **Level 3** entails a consideration of how the literary text may communicate with other *texts* through aspects of intertextuality, either by way of more or less explicit references or implicitly through similarities in terms of topic, theme, and/ or genre.

At all three levels, the reader's **emotion** and **cognition** are involved. The affective dimension may, for instance, be activated when the reader feels empathy for literary characters, when they react to their actions and life choices with shock or disdain, or when they relate certain aspects

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4   The "implied author" and the "implied reader" are terms used by Iser (1978) to describe what can be inferred about the author and an ideal reader based upon the way that the literary work is written.

of the plot to their own experiences. The cognitive dimension involves a more distanced approach, in which the reader, through critical analysis, seeks a deeper understanding of the text as well as their own and other readers' responses to the text in addition to its relationship to other texts. The emotion and cognition components are thus closely related to the remaining, overarching components of the model: **narrative style and structure (NSS)** and **cultural/social/historical subject position (C/S/H)**. The former component pertains to the intercultural reader's identification of different compositional elements and their reflection on the *effects* of these elements in terms of how the text positions itself and its readers. Similarly, the intercultural reader considers how, why, and to what extent different cultural, social, and historical subject positions of text(s) and reader(s) may make some interpretations viable or plausible, and others impossible or unlikely (see Hoff, 2016, 2019 for more elaborate descriptions of the MIR).

## Exploring the links between the MIR and the concept of 21st century skills

The following section explores how notions of 21st century skills are reflected in the MIR and considers what this interconnection may imply for pedagogical practice. Both potential strengths and limitations of the model as a pedagogical tool are addressed in this respect. While the discussion has a contextual basis in LK20, it also draws on relevant, international research perspectives on intercultural language education and literature studies. Furthermore, for illustrative purposes, it refers to examples of literary texts which are often used in (or would be suitable for) lower and upper secondary EFL classrooms in Norway.

### Cross-cultural communication

The first and most readily apparent reason why MIR-based approaches to literature can contribute to promoting 21st century skills is of course the model's overarching focus on cross-cultural communication. Indeed, the model provides a comprehensive framework for exploring how culture

affects the communication between reader(s) and literary text(s) by explicitly incorporating the diverse perspectives of a wide variety of previous as well as contemporary readers and texts from within and across cultures. Due to the interlinked nature of the different levels and components of the MIR, it is not possible to associate this particular 21st century skill, or any of the others for that matter, with one specific aspect of the model. Consequently, the intercultural dimension will remain a relevant concern throughout the subsequent discussion. However, some important characteristics as regards the model's approach to concepts with particular relevance to intercultural communication must be pointed out here at the outset, as these characteristics illustrate how the model aligns with curricular goals pertaining to intercultural competence (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3) as well as state-of-the-art perspectives in intercultural education research.

First of all, the MIR is based on an understanding of culture and identity as multifaceted, dynamic and fluid phenomena (cf. Council of Europe, 2018; Holliday, 2011; Illmann & Nynäs, 2017), which can be seen in the model's representation of both literary texts and readers. The MIR moves beyond an understanding of the literary text as an expression of the singular, personal voice of a culture (cf. Fenner, 2001) by acknowledging the mix of diverse and potentially conflicting voices it may encompass (cf. Bakhtin, 2006; Greek, 2008). A practical consequence of this shift is that pupils must be helped to recognise and navigate the multiple and complex identities of the text. Reading processes of this kind presuppose that pupils are not only prompted to identify the array of literary voices which exist within the text but also to reflect on which C/S/H subject positions they render. The aim for the classroom participants in this regard will be to investigate whether these voices provide a unified or multifaceted representation of the environment(s) depicted in the text.

Moreover, pupils would benefit from being exposed to Level 2 readers and Level 3 texts that represent different, and potentially conflicting, perspectives *within* cultures as well as universal aspects *across* different cultures. The pupils' own C/S/H subject positions can also be addressed and problematised. For instance, pupils who have personally experienced

discrimination or war-related trauma might have a very different reaction to John Boyne's Holocaust novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) or Ruta Sepety's novel (2019) *The Fountains of Silence* (a depiction of life in Spain under the fascist dictatorship of General Franco) than individuals whose only exposure to the horrors of genocide and armed conflict come through the TV news. On the other hand, a consequence of today's inter-connected and digitalised world is that most young people in Norway have access to unfiltered accounts of such human suffering through social media. This has most recently been seen in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as TikTok has become an arena for sharing and engaging with personal reports from the war zone (Nodland, 2022). As regards this particular example, then, it would be relevant for pupils to reflect on whether and how their stance as 21st century digital natives affects their responses to literary texts which depict war and human trauma, and to what extent these responses can thus be said to be "culture-dependent" (cf. Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3).

In this connection, the C/S/H component of the MIR can be criticised for its lack of specificity. For instance, this label does not explicitly indi-cate which differentiating factors might be relevant to take into account when considering the impact of "social" perspectives (e.g., identity mark-ers like gender, age, religion, education, occupation, etc.) (cf. Dypedahl & Lund, 2020; Illmann & Nynäs, 2017). Moreover, whereas the complex character of the literary text is clearly reflected in the MIR through its focus on textual multivocality, the complex and dynamic nature of read-ers' identities is admittedly a more implicit concern in descriptions of the model (see Hoff, 2016, 2019). Teachers must therefore be attentive to diverse facets of cultural identity in order to ensure nuanced and compre-hensive classroom deliberations that allow pupils to see the text as well as their own and other readers' identities in a "multilingual and multi-cultural context" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3). Accordingly, their engagement with English literature can help them to move beyond their own "here and now" perspectives in a way that challenges reductionist perceptions of culture, identity, and intercul-tural communication.

# In-depth learning

As previously mentioned, the curriculum describes in-depth learning as a process of increasing complexity (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 12). The multileveled approach inherent in the MIR lays the groundwork for such progressively demanding learning processes. In practice, this would, for instance, entail starting with matters related to Level 1 of the model before moving on to Levels 2 and 3. At Level 1, one way for teachers to facilitate a step-by-step advancement would be to guide the pupils' attention gradually away from the concrete literary voices which operate at the surface of the text(s) to the more abstract voices which can be found beneath the surface. Similarly, following their identification of textual aspects related to narrative structure and style, the pupils can be asked to consider the *effects* of such compositional elements. Some relevant aspects to consider in this connection, would, for example, be how the narrative point of view influences the pupils' perception of the literary characters and plot, who is given a chance to speak in the text and who is left out, who the text appeals to as well and whether or not the pupils identify with this implied reader. This type of investigation will be important if the pupils are to be able to recognise notions of "implicit conflict" (Hoff, 2019, 2029) in their communication with the text. In other words, it may enable them to discover aspects of ambiguity which are not immediately apparent to them and which will only emerge as they begin to peel away multiple layers of meaning.

As classroom deliberations move on to Level 2 of the model, a natural point of departure would be to focus on the different subjectivities that are represented within the classroom. Indeed, it should be acknowledged that this setting constitutes a multi-voiced, multicultural sphere in itself (Thyberg, 2012; Tornberg, 2004), which enables the classroom participants to reflect on how and to what extent cultural background influences their individual and collective responses to the text. However, an important way in which the MIR ensures particularly expansive and complex text interpretation processes is that it explicitly requires the reader to seek out other reader experiences that cannot necessarily be found in their physical vicinity – for instance, it would be impossible to

locate readers from other historical contexts among the pupils who are present in the classroom. Some potential pedagogical resources which have been suggested in this connection are book reviews (to be found in newspapers, magazines, podcasts, or similar) or alternative versions of the text (e.g., graphic novels or film adaptations which can be said to represent an illustrator's or film director's interpretation of the original text) (Hoff, 2016). Moreover, it should be noted that the digitalised school of today offers opportunities for classroom participants to deliberate the text with pupils in other geographical locations through internet-based communication (see Porto, 2014).

At the next stage of the reading process, teachers can ensure that Level 3 of the MIR is brought into play by prompting pupils to reflect on texts which share intertextual links with the Level 1 text. In many cases, pupils will be able to identify these links of their own accord (see Hoff, 2017). However, some intertextual references which might be taken for granted by a native English speaker will be more obscure to EFL learners in Norway (Birketveit, 2021; Wiland, 2016). Another factor to consider is the pupils' ages; for example, while they might recognise the 1980s aesthetic which permeates the Netflix hit series *Stranger Things* (Duffer & Duffer, 2016-), they are less likely to have heard of the 1980s film *The Goonies* (Donner, 1985), which served as a major inspiration for the series (Hedash, 2021). In such instances, the teacher's role as an intercultural mediator (see Byram, 1997, 2021) will be of great importance.

Another central point for consideration would be how alternative versions of the text (Level 2) as well as other, related texts (Level 3) can represent an "indexicality between discursive events that took place at different times in different places and now make new meaning in unexpected ways" (Kramsch, 2011, p. 359). A concrete example which might be used to illustrate this point is Baz Luhrmann's (1996) motion picture *Romeo + Juliet*, a modernised version of Shakespeare's famous play. The film retains the Elizabethan English dialogue of Shakespeare's text while reframing the original tale of two feuding, aristocratic families in 14th century Italy as a story about warring mafia empires in the contemporary, fictional city of Verona Beach. In doing so, Luhrmann's version not

only brings Shakespeare's text from the past into the present but also adds new meaning to the narrative. Another text which achieves a similar effect is Madeline Miller's (2011) young adult novel *Song of Achilles*. Retelling a story from Homer's *The Iliad* via the point of view of Achilles' best friend Patroclus, the book portrays the two male characters' relationship as romantic in character. Whilst the setting remains the same in Miller's version as in the original, the alternative P.O.V. sheds new light on an ancient and classic Greek narrative, thereby opening up for other ways to understand it.

By exploring alternative versions of text as well as aspects of intertextuality, then, pupils may gain insight into how any human discourse or text carries traces of other voices and texts (Bakhtin, 2006; Dervin, 2016) as well as how representations of culture can be manipulated, reframed, and recontextualised (Kramsch, 2011). Thereby, MIR-based approaches to literature will arguably contribute to another aspect of in-depth learning, which is described in the curriculum as the ability to recognise connections between and across different contexts (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 12).

## Critical thinking

Pupils' deliberation of multiple perspectives related to all three levels of the MIR will inevitably involve critical thinking, as this undertaking requires them to assess different sources and scrutinise established ideas (i.e., prior interpretations) about the literary text. In doing so, they may discover that their own point of view is incomplete (cf. Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 7). However, the classroom participants might also experience that the text itself guides them towards a specific and widely accepted interpretation (Hoff & Habegger-Conti, 2022). In order to gain insight into possible reasons for such diverse as well as uniform reader responses, pupils must learn to explore whether and how the text and different reader responses reflect particular motivations, hidden agendas, or underlying ideologies (cf. Dervin, 2016; Hoff, 2020). As "fake news" has become a pressing issue in contemporary media (Kendeou et al., 2019), the pupils' critical investigation of such

matters can be said to be a particularly relevant pedagogical concern in today's language classroom.

The very nature of literary reading – an interpretative endeavour which involves looking beyond the words on the page – suggests that pupils' encounters with English language literature can play an important part in developing this type of critical thinking skills. However, if this is to be achieved, they must be guided beyond the surface level of the text in order to examine underlying factors which affect the relationship between reader and text. The preceding discussion has already hinted at the significance of the NSS component of the MIR in this connection. By paying attention to matters pertaining to this component, pupils can gain an awareness of the manipulative effects of the literary text, i.e., the ways in which it shapes their responses by relying on a range of different literary techniques (Volkmann, 2015). They can also be encouraged by the teacher to deliberate which implications this might have for how they navigate the intercultural dimension of the textual encounter. For example, when an author creates suspense through a controlled release of information, it may enhance the reader's eagerness to find out what happens next in addition to increasing their emotional response to the events that unfold in the story, which might come in the way of a more analytical or critical approach. Alternatively, a matter-of-fact, reporter-style account of events may make the reader indifferent to the literary characters and their experiences. One possible consequence of this is that it becomes difficult for pupils to develop an empathetic understanding of otherness, to the extent that their encounter with English language literature hinders rather than promotes their intercultural learning processes (see Hoff, 2017).

Furthermore, the reader's role in this equation must not be forgotten. For instance, pupils' interpretations of text may be influenced by their political stance, or they may be eager to express opinions and ideas about the text that they think are expected of them but which do not reflect their actual mindset (see Dervin, 2010; Hoff, 2020). Discussing such elusive aspects of the reader – text relationship may arguably not only promote language learners' abilities as intercultural readers of literature; they may also become better equipped to navigate notions of implicit conflict (Hoff, 2019, 2029) in encounters with non-literary texts as well as

in intercultural communication processes in the "real world", most notably in terms of recognising that their own and other people's actions and words may be shaped by underlying factors and thus cannot necessarily be taken at face value.

## Problem-solving, creativity and innovation

LK20 associates the 21st century skills of problem-solving, creativity, and innovation with qualities like inquisitiveness, imagination, and the ability to come up with new and original solutions to predicaments (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 17). The relevance of these skills in connection with MIR-based approaches to literature might seem far from self-explanatory to teachers. However, the ultimate aim of prompting pupils to engage in a continuous questioning of alternative perspectives and competing interpretations of the text is to enable them to challenge these prior meanings in order to construct novel and creative interpretations (Hoff, 2016).

One way for teachers to help along such processes in the classroom is to ask the pupils to compose alternative, Level 2 versions of the literary text which tell its story in new and unexpected ways (cf. Kramsch, 2011). This might, for instance, be achieved by changing the narrative P.O.V., depicting events according to a different cultural/social/historical setting and/or retelling the story by drawing on (or mixing) conventions of other literary genres and text formats. The pupils' artistic and creative abilities will thus be called upon. However, it is important that such classroom activities are regarded as more than an opportunity for the pupils to express themselves creatively. When given the opportunity to reject the version of the world on offer in the Level 1 text (or prior alternative Level 2 versions) and to suggest new, fresh renditions, the pupils will be challenged to participate actively in the interplay of multiple voices in human discourse and texts (cf. Bakhtin, 2006). From a critical intercultural pedagogy perspective (e.g., Dasli & Diaz, 2017), this type of endeavour comes with a certain degree of responsibility, since the pupils' version of the text has the possibility to contribute to a more egalitarian social order by proposing a more just, realistic, or diverse representation of the world than is

offered by the Level 1 text. This is, of course, somewhat dependent on what kind of text is brought into the classroom in the first place – for instance, multicultural literature will represent marginalised voices and include diverse perspectives to a much greater extent than most of the "classics" within the Anglo-American literary canon (Dong, 2005). Nevertheless, recontextualisations of any kind of text will inevitably bring something new to the table. The pupils may thus be encouraged to make conscious decisions about whose voices to include and not to include in their text, and to reflect on how their artistic choices might affect the way in which these voices are represented, and consequently perceived, by readers (see Porto & Zembylas, 2022). In this way, pupils' engagement with literature can arguably serve a problem-solving purpose in the sense that their rec-reations of the Level 1 text may challenge "taken for granted" representations of the world and open up for new ways of seeing, depicting and, ultimately, defining it.

## Collaboration

One unique potential of pupils' classroom encounter with literature (as opposed to the reading they may be doing in their spare time) is that it can take place as a socio-cultural process (Aase, 2005). Because the reading of literature is highly subjective and no single, "correct" interpretation exists, classroom discussions about this type of text may help pupils to deal with opposing ideas in a constructive manner (cf. Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 11). In other words, socio-cultural approaches to literature offer opportunities for pupils to participate in communities of (interpretative) disagreement (cf. Iversen, 2014). In this connection, it is worth noting that the MIR's explicit inclusion of diverse reader perspectives makes such collaborative reading practices a pedagogical necessity rather than a possibility. Indeed, collaboration among the pupils will be imperative in order to ensure that all levels and components of the MIR are dealt with adequately.

However, whereas previous empirical research on literary reading in language education has found that social interaction between pupils can lead to rich and multifaceted reading experiences (Rødnes, 2011;

Thyberg, 2012), it is important for teachers to be aware of the fact that the socio-cultural dimension can also have an undermining effect. For instance, homogeneous group constellations or interpersonal issues among the pupils may stop them from following up on insightful observations or delving deeper into aspects of the text that they do not understand (Asplund, 2010). Furthermore, there is not always correspondence between task potentials and the reading and learning processes which take place in the classroom (Hoff, 2017). This means that while the MIR may very well be used as a basis for developing discussion prompts and classroom activities, a significant factor will be the teacher's "attentiveness to what is said (and what is not said) by the learners [so that] interesting observations can be elaborated upon, problematic statements can be countered and omissions can be addressed" (Hoff, 2019, p. 108) during classroom deliberations on literature. In order to be able to do this, the teacher must have a good overview of all the interactions which take place in the classroom. This is a rather daunting task – for example, it is not physically feasible for the teacher to be privy to everything that is said at all times when pupils talk about the text in groups. In this respect, collaborative writing tools like Wikis (see Brox & Jakobsen, 2014) might serve a useful purpose in the sense that the pupils' note taking during group discussions can give the teacher valuable insight into issues which might be necessary to address *in plenum*.

## Multiliteracies

Finally, when it comes to multiliteracies, previous research (Hoff, 2017, 2019) has suggested that reading practices based on the MIR may call upon pupils' "out-of-school literacies" (Hull & Schultz, 2001) and thereby contribute to bridging what Habegger-Conti (2015) describes as "the gap between 'old' and 'new' media" (p. 106) in the EFL classroom. This is a somewhat misleading proposition, since competences which were previously regarded as an out-of-school concern have now become an educational priority, as evidenced by the explicit inclusion of multimodal texts in LK20 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 3). Nevertheless, the preceding discussion has provided insight into

how MIR-based approaches to literature can potentially develop pupils' awareness of connections between and across "old" and "new" media, for instance by exploring how the film version of a story relates to the original, script-based text, or by creating alternative versions which draw upon other or multiple modalities. Furthermore, empirical investigations indicate that when pupils consider matters pertaining to Level 3 of the MIR during classroom encounters with "traditional" literary texts, they are inclined to identify intertextual links to multimodal media like 21st century films and TV series (Hoff, 2017). If there exists a gap between old and new text types in the English classroom, then, the above examples illustrate why and how a pedagogical tool like the MIR might play a role in closing it.

However, an important limitation of the model must also be addressed in the context of multiliteracies. The original description of the NSS component of the MIR (see Hoff, 2016, p. 60) refers to textual aspects which are associated with traditional, script-based literary texts (e.g., narrative point of view, tone, imagery, plot, setting, theme). Consequently, it does not specify how the competent intercultural reader deals with texts that rely on a combination of different semiotic modes to convey meaning (e.g., visual, linguistic, audio, spatial and gestural, cf. The New London Group, 1996). This is an important issue for classroom participants to consider. Whilst pupils' engagement with multimodal literature can add layers of enjoyment and insight to the reading experience (Rimmereide, 2021), the complex interplay of meaning-bearing elements can quite possibly also lead to misunderstandings, particularly when it comes to the intercultural dimension of the textual encounter (Benavides, 2019).

A forthcoming article (Hoff & Habegger-Conti, 2022) expands upon the original conceptualisation of the MIR in order to clarify what the model entails in relation to encounters with multimodal literature. One particularly relevant feature to note when it comes to the narrative style and structure of this type of text is that the different modes may not only compliment or enhance one another; they may also contradict or obscure one another (see Hallet, 2018). The TV sitcom *Modern Family* (Levitan & Loyd, 2009–2020) is a relevant case in point in this respect: On the one hand, the series challenges a number of stereotypes by depicting the

relatable, daily lives of a blended family whose members have diverse ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations as well as biological and non-biological affiliations, thereby normalising various "unconventional" family constellations. On the other hand, the series also reinforces some of the stereotypes it sets out to circumvent by way of different audio-visual cues, including costumes and the actors' exaggerated mannerisms and use of accents. Further layers of meaning are added through the series' attempt to be "in on the joke" with the audience (for instance, the actors frequently stare directly into the camera with a sheepish grin or roll their eyes when delivering a line). In other words, texts which rely on an interplay between different meaning-bearing elements tend to convey complex messages, some of which may be difficult for pupils to unravel. When relying on the MIR as a foundation for pedagogical approaches to multimodal literature, then, it is crucial that teachers move beyond textual aspects captured by the original description of the NSS component of the model and develop strategies for directing pupils' attention to the unique compositional features of this type of text. A key concern in this respect will be to explore how the different meaning-bearing elements work together (or against each other) to communicate meaning.

## Conclusion

The present chapter has explored the affordances of literature as an educational medium in the School of the Future, with a particular focus on the teaching and learning of English in Norway. With reference to the new educational needs which have emerged in the wake of recent societal developments, the chapter has discussed what 21st century skills entail in a context of literary reading and how MIR-based approaches to literature in Norwegian EFL classrooms can potentially contribute to the development of these skills.

We have seen that the encounter with English language text is linked to notions of interculturality in LK20, and that the curriculum reflects an understanding of culture and identity as dynamic, multifaceted concepts. A practical consequence of this is that classroom work related to English literature must contribute to pupils' *cross-cultural communication* abilities

in a manner which challenges reductionist perceptions of such phenomena. The chapter has argued that the MIR provides an apt framework for classroom work in this respect, as its inclusion of a wide range of reader perspectives and texts from within and across cultures may help pupils to see texts as well as their own and other readers' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context. However, the discussion has also highlighted the need for teachers to reflect critically on what the C/S/H component of the model entails in order to ensure sufficiently nuanced classroom discussions about cultural identity. When it comes to *in-depth learning* as an aspect of literary reading, this has been described as a matter of interacting with text(s) and different reader responses through a process of increasing complexity, with the aim to explore connections between and across different contexts. The chapter has provided insight into how the multiple levels of the MIR may be used as a guideline for directing pupils towards a gradual and systematic process of discovery in this respect. Moreover, we have seen that LK20 links *critical thinking* to the ability to engage in processes of analytical scrutiny. The chapter has argued that such criticality is crucial to pupils' intercultural encounters with English literature, as it requires them to reflect on underlying dimensions of the reader – text relationship. The significance of the NSS component of the MIR has been highlighted in this context, as has the need to explore ideological and motivational facets of reader responses. Furthermore, when it comes to *problem-solving abilities*, *creativity* and *innovation*, literary reading has been proposed as an artistic endeavour that can challenge "taken for granted" representations of the world. The chapter has argued that the inclusion of alternative versions of text as a type of Level 2 reader response in the MIR challenges pupils to generate imaginative recreations of the L1 text. It has been suggested that this will prompt them to participate actively in the interplay of multiple voices in human discourse and texts; as a result, they may come up with new ways of representing and defining the world. As concerns *collaboration*, the emphasis on multiple perspectives in the MIR presupposes that the classroom be allowed to take shape as a community of interpretative disagreement when pupils are reading and working with literature. The chapter has pointed to both beneficial as well as problematic aspects of sociocultural reading processes, and the

key role of the teacher in organising, monitoring, and guiding classroom discussions with respect to the text has been highlighted in this regard. Finally, *multiliteracies* in a context of literary reading pertains, first and foremost, to the skills needed to engage competently with multimodal texts. Due to a lack of specific references to the unique compositional features of this type of text in the original description of the NSS component of the MIR, the chapter has emphasised the need for teachers to develop strategies for helping pupils to recognise and navigate the complex interplay of different meaning-bearing elements when multimodal literature provides a foundation for classroom work.

Similar to the concept of 21st century skills itself, many of the ideas put forth in the present chapter are not new *per se*. However, by clarifying how curricular aims related to 21st century skills and the encounter with text may be synthesised through classroom work related to English literature, the chapter has hopefully illuminated why this type of text should not be regarded as "outdated" but rather as a highly relevant medium for teaching and learning in the Norwegian School of the Future. Moreover, by concretising the theoretical and practical links between the MIR and the concept of 21st century skills, the discussion has expounded upon previous descriptions of the MIR, thereby providing further insight into its relevance as a theoretical framework for classroom practice. While the present chapter has theorised and exemplified how the MIR might be used as a pedagogical tool for promoting 21st century skills in lower and upper secondary EFL classrooms in Norway, there is a need for empirical investigations which can uncover additional possibilities and challenges related to the practical applicability of this model as a basis for pedagogical practice, both in the particular educational context which has been considered here as well as elsewhere in the world.

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