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Paying It Forward
An action-based investigation of possible uses of texts in an English classroom

Att skicka vidare
En aktionsbaserad undersökning om möjlig användning av det vidgade textbegreppet i ett engelskt klassrum

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PREFACE

This dissertation and the connected project were carried out with an eighth grade class together with us, Caroline and Sara. Both of us are responsible for the text in this dissertation, since we worked collaboratively throughout the process. In the project with the students, we planned, started and finished the lesson series together. However, Caroline was the teacher of the lesson series since it took place at her VFT school and since Sara had her own VFT to attend. As a consequence, Caroline was solely responsible for the observations except for the introductory lesson and lesson number six. Both of us managed the questionnaire and the interviews.

We would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to the participating students, their teacher and the school. We would also like to thank our supervisor and our examiner for the help that they provided.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to explore how we, as teachers, can use texts and develop ways of working with texts in an English classroom with an eighth grade class. The syllabus states that different texts should be implemented but it does not express how this could or should be done. In this particular study we engaged in action research where we planned, carried out and evaluated a lesson series involving three different texts related to the same content, namely the story of Pay It Forward. The evaluation took the form of a triangulation of observations, a questionnaire and four interviews. We engaged a class from the eighth grade in the evaluation of the project since teaching and learning are intertwined.

The evaluation of this project indicated that it might be beneficial to use three different texts and text types, related to the same content. It might also be beneficial to take the students’ literary repertoires into consideration when choosing what texts to use. Another factor that we think should affect the choice of texts is the students’ thoughts on their preferred way of input. Through the evaluation of the project we have also seen possible benefits of working with assignments in connection to the texts. To include a variety of assignments might help the students to develop the four different skills, reading, listening, speaking and writing,

Keywords: Texts, action research, multimodal text and learning styles.
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1. INTRODUCTION

“[T]hink of an idea to change [your teaching] and put it into ACTION!”

~Pay It Forward~

The changes in our society, with increasing amount of information everywhere, leads to a need for education to provide students with sufficient tools to read, analyze and interpret different texts. The syllabus for English in Sweden states that students should “develop their ability to read different types of texts for pleasure and to obtain information and knowledge” (Skolverket, 2000:07). Despite this statement, some teachers do not provide students with the wide range of texts that is set out to be used. A teacher in Christina Olin-Schellers thesis even asked “do you mean that a text could be more than just a page in a book, for example a film?” (Olin-Scheller, 2006, p. 108).

Yes, a text can appear in many different forms. A text is a message and these messages could, according to, for instance, the National Agency for Education in Sweden, be communicated in writing, in pictures and orally (Skolverket, 2007:4, p. 8). This expanded concept of texts became evident in the syllabuses in 1994. Thus, different text types should be implemented and worked with, but there are no directions of how this could or should be done. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate how this goal can be put into action.

In this project we implemented and worked with three different text types in an eighth grade class in order to distinguish how we can use texts and work with texts in this classroom. Through action research in this dissertation, we planned, carried out and evaluated a series of lessons. Through this we wanted to learn from experience instead of our experience being dependent upon theories (Harmer, 2005, p. 345). At all times, it is important for a teacher to make sense of what s/he is doing, since “[…] teachers could not even begin their ‘practice’ without some knowledge of the situation in which they are operating and some idea of what it is that needs to be done” (Carr & Kemmis, 2006, p. 113).

1.1 Aim

It is stated in the steering documents and in the syllabus for English that different texts should be implemented in the classroom. Thus, our aim is to explore how we, with an eighth grade
class, can use several texts and text types and develop ways of working with them in our English classroom. To be able to come to a conclusion, we engaged in action research where we planned, carried out and evaluated a lesson series involving three different text types which were related to the same content. In addition to our evaluation of the conducted project, we invited the eighth grade students involved in our project to elaborate on how they want to work with texts, since teaching and learning are intertwined. The evaluation took the form of observations by us (appendix 3), a questionnaire answered by all 23 students (appendix 4) and interviews with four students (appendix 5, 7, 8). The reason for the inclusion of three different text types was for us to explore whether these students preferred a certain way of receiving input since the different text types we used contained different sensory modes. Our hypothesis is that an inclusion of several texts and text types can provide these students with an opportunity to choose the text that they prefer in relation to their learning style and thus their preferred way of input.

1.2 Research Question

- How can the three different texts in our project be implemented and worked with in our English classroom with our eighth grade students?
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Text

Since we wanted to implement texts and work with texts in our classroom, we need to define what a text really is and what the steering documents for schools in Sweden say about it. The syllabus states that the communicative competences, production, interaction and reception, should be developed in language teaching. Within these competences, the word text is frequently used. In the goals to strive for it is stated that the students should:

- develop their ability to read different types of texts for pleasure and to obtain information and knowledge (Skolverket, 2000:07).

But then, what is a text? When looking in a dictionary the word text means a “linguistic utterance, usually written or printed, but sometimes oral” (NE, our translation). The National Agency for Education in Sweden, among others, broadens the view of a text with the concept of the expanded text (det vidgade textbegreppet). According to the National Agency for Education in Sweden an expanded text is when a message is brought to a person in another mode than the written text. These messages could be communicated in pictures as well as orally (Skolverket, 2007:4, p. 8). The concept of the expanded text was mentioned in Swedish steering documents for the first time in 1994. In the syllabus from 2000 the concept of the expanded text became even more evident but mostly in the subject of Swedish. In the first outline for the new syllabus in English for 2011 it is stated that the students should be familiar with different kinds of texts and genres within the framework of the concept of the expanded text, which includes written text, spoken text, pictures, films, sounds and other media. The students should also develop their ability to read and listen to different kinds of texts for experiences, information, knowledge and opinions (Skolverket, 2009a).

The National Agency for Education in Sweden suggests that it is important to interpret texts as much more than just the written word. The surrounding society undergoes changes and this result in a whole range of mediums that are important to and have great influence on teenagers outside of school. Education should keep up with those changes in order to help the students connect to the outside world. The students do not only need help with literacy, but with media literacy. They need to know more than just what words mean and how they are
formed. Teachers need to help the students to develop a critical and analytical eye to different texts and media (Skolverket, 2009b).

In this dissertation text is seen as so much more than the written text alone. The syllabus states that it is important to involve different texts in the classroom and we agree. However, the syllabus is not clear when it comes to how to work with texts and that is the step that we are trying to investigate. Hereafter, we will use the word text as the term for all of the above mentioned texts.

In this dissertation we try to find ways of working with texts in our classroom and to be able to do that we need to look at what other researchers have seen and done to be able to relate that to our research. Christina Olin-Scheller has investigated the use of different texts in the classroom and she specifically looked at film, which also was our main text. In 2006 Olin-Scheller wrote a thesis which focused on textual worlds in Swedish upper secondary schools. Her studies show that the teachers, who she interviewed, were not at all familiar with the concept of the expanded text. Thus they had not implemented other texts than the written text except for the occasional film once or twice a year (2006, p. 108). Since film was the sole representative for the expanded text outside of written text, Olin-Scheller carefully observed the use of film in the classroom. The atmosphere in the classroom often changed when a film was screened. Olin-Scheller could see that the students became more excited and relaxed. Three perspectives were distinguished in terms of the use of film: 1) film as illustration, 2) film as supplement and 3) film as comparison. The first perspective entailed a visualization of, for instance, an epoch. The screening of the film was not followed by any analysis. The purpose was solely to illustrate something. In the second perspective, film was used as an extra activity, often at the end of a project. In the third perspective film was used for comparisons to the written text. The written text was seen as the correct text and story to proceed from (2006, p. 112).

In a classroom there can be a multitude of literary repertoires. When a teacher brings in and uses a text it can either collide or match with the existing literary repertoires. In the four classrooms that Olin-Scheller examined she found that there often were collisions between the literary repertoires of the teachers and the students rather than matching of their repertoires. The texts, that the teachers found meaningful and educational, seemed meaningless and boring to the students. It seemed as though the teachers were not aware of the literary
repertoires of the students and thus not aware of the impact that these repertoires had on the teaching of literature (2006, p. 215). Olin-Scheller suggests that teaching should be meaningful and rewarding for the students and this through connecting it to the literary repertoires that are more close to home for the students. As a teacher you have to think about making the students more accustomed to different types of texts. A student has to be able to interpret, take active part in and take a critical standpoint towards different narrations (2006, p. 237).

When talking about the literary repertoires in the classroom and especially film we need to think about the fact that the students’ literary repertoires often falls under popular culture. Magnus Persson, a Swedish researcher who focuses his research on popular culture and its role in an educational setting, states that the Swedish school and education system has a tradition of discouraging popular culture. However, there has been some positive change in acceptance of popular culture in the most recent years (Persson, 2000, p. 17). Persson also expresses that popular culture has an important role in many people’s everyday lives, and especially in the everyday lives of children and youths. Though, this type of culture is mostly present outside the educational setting. Persson continues his reasoning about the role of popular culture in school settings, as he finds it being a tool for development of identities and also an alternative way of education (2000, pp. 16-17). Persson also discusses the possible enhancement of the students’ motivation if their experiences are considered to play a role in the classroom (2000, p. 58). However, there can be difficulties with bringing in culture from the realm outside of school into an educational setting. Persson discusses the need for reading the texts with, for instance, the focus on a certain perspective of analysis. It could for example be a historically or culturally based analysis (2000, pp. 78-79). Thus, popular culture from the students’ spare time has to be approached differently in an educational setting.

Suzanne E. Wade and Elizabeth Birr Moje, professors in educational studies, carried out a study in the United States where they discussed how teachers can use texts in different ways in the classroom. The teachers that they investigated focused on teaching approaches that emphasized transmission of knowledge or teaching approaches that emphasized students’ participation in knowledge construction. If a teacher focuses on using texts as transmission of knowledge, s/he uses the texts as the transmission of an “authorized, ‘official’ knowledge” and does not take students different abilities, races, ethnicities, classes or genders into consideration. The classroom is rather teacher centered and the teacher’s oral and written texts
are used to transmit and control learning. Texts produced by the students are used as tests to check if the students can recall the information correctly. If the teacher instead focuses on participation in the classroom, s/he accedes to the constructivist views of learning and teaching. The students are seen as “active constructors of their own knowledge”. They interpret texts as tools for learning and for construction of new knowledge. The participatory approach does not have certain texts in mind for this. They rely on a wide range of texts (Wade & Moje, 2000).

2.2 Multimodal Texts

Our hypothesis on how to work with texts concerns learning styles and different modes being adequate for letting the students choose the text that they prefer in relation to their learning style. Therefore, we find it necessary to include a section on multimodal texts and learning styles. This also since film, which is a multimodal text, was the main text in our project.

A text can, as said before, contain many different modes. It can for example be written or spoken. If one text contains different modes at the same time, the text is multimodal. An example of a multimodal text is a film. Information (input) is received through many different modes: through reading, listening and watching (Marner, 1998). The opposite of a multimodal text is the unimodal text. This text only contains one mode, for example a written text (Fadel, 2008, p. 14).

Multimodal learning, learning through more than one mode, has been suggested to be more effective than a unimodal way of learning. Charles Fadel from Cisco Systems focuses his research on the use and benefits of technology in education. Recent research, undertaken by Fadel, states that there can be considerable gains in terms of learning if visual modes are added to verbal modes. Therefore, to use a multitude and variety of modalities in teaching can be beneficial since students, who use well-designed combinations of modalities, supposedly learn more than students who only use, for example, a unimodal text (Fadel, 2008, p. 14). This is also supported by a number of studies presented in the article “Learning with Media” by Robert B. Kozma, a researcher with interests in science of education and technology. The studies mentioned and explained in the article sought to distinguish the recalling of content and learning outcome of visual or auditory or the combination of both. The research showed that the combined use of visual and auditory components seemed more beneficial for learning than visual-only or auditory-only (Kozma, 1991, p. 191).
A number of studies involving the usage of television and video suggest that these tools are valuable to use in school situations. In the article “Non-optimal uses of video in the classroom” it is stated that “TV and video are […] perceived by teachers as especially effective for reaching visual learners” (Hobbs, 2006, p. 36). Ruth Ann Burns, a researcher who focused on the use of television as an interactive component in science classes, found that the writing improved in terms of creativity and descriptiveness, the assignments were done with more innovation and the students seemed more confident and enthusiastic (Burns, 2006, p. 37). In a study, of paper-based training in comparison to the use of video as a teaching tool, the researchers found that the use of video appeared more effective in terms of the students’ performances (Neef, Trachtenberg, Loeb & Sterner, 2009, p. 422).

Researchers state that students are used to consume and produce multimodal texts outside of school. However, it is still the written word that achieves the highest status in schools and which assessment is mostly based on (Godhe, 2009).

### 2.3 Learning Styles

The theories about learning styles assume that everyone can learn, but with different tools and at different levels. In a class of 30 students, there could be several preferred ways of learning. One approach/mode for learning does not fit all students. It all depends on content, context and learner (Dunn & Dunn, 1993, pp. 3-4). All learners have one or several preferred learning styles and they could be described as “an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 59). When investigating how to use and work with texts in our classroom, we felt that this was something worth looking into since we want to reach all students. Researchers cannot determine whether a learning style is preset or if it develops through experience. Nevertheless, researchers are certain of two things: firstly, that a student’s preferred way of working is never wrong and secondly, that one learning style does not suit all learners. We should therefore encourage learners to use all means available for learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 59).

Learning styles are divided into different groups dependent on modes of perception: visual learners who learn by seeing, aural learners who learn by hearing and kinesthetic learners who use experience and practice to learn (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 59). The educational
researchers Kenneth Dunn & Rita Dunn have created a learning style model where they include a variety of different factors, apart from the perceptually based learning styles, which might influence how people learn. Some of the factors are: the environment in which the learning takes place, emotional factors such as motivation, structure, adaption and perseverance. Other factors include sociological elements like pair work, individual work, group work, variation of activities, whether you prefer to work as a team or under the leadership of an authority. Other things which might influence the way people learn are if they are impulsive or reflective, what they have eaten during the day and what time of day the learning takes place (Dunn & Dunn, 1993, pp. 3-4).

The theories about learning styles have been under debate. Learning styles are not the only way to individualize teaching, but one out of many ways to do it. Learning style models have been questioned for their scientific basis. It is difficult to prove that the matching of learning styles to teaching methods has an effect on students’ learning outcome. Furthermore, learning styles has been said to label learners and therefore restrict them (Wikipedia). However, we believe that the theories have relevance, but as with all theories, we have to decide on what we think is adequate to use and what we do not want to use. We believe that it is important to know that all students are different and that they learn in different ways. This to be able to plan lessons that hopefully appeal to and develop all students. The syllabus states that the four skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking should be developed in language teaching. This is done through both input and output. Reception, interaction and production should be used to achieve communicative competence (Skolverket, 2000:07). As pointed out earlier, different students might prefer different ways of absorbing new information (learning styles). The students can also have preferences and strengths when it comes to the different skills, but the teacher has to make sure that all the skills are developed so that the students will not become restricted.

Lena Boström and Thomas Kroksmark conducted research that implied that the achievement and motivation of students are enhanced when the teaching is based on the students’ individual and preferred learning style or styles (Boström & Kroksmark, 2005, pp. 39-41). However, it is important to provide students with multi-sensory learning to be able to keep as many senses as active as possible in order to augment learning and appeal to everyone in the class (Boström, 1998, p. 57)
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Action Research

With this dissertation we strive to gain an understanding on how we could incorporate and work with a wide range of texts in our classroom. To be able to do this we decided to engage in action research. Action research is ideal when you want to change something in your practice, for example when you want to implement a new initiative and make sure how to do it effectively. Action research concerns actors and in this case it is the teacher who plays the part of the actor (Waters-Adams, 2006). The teacher experiences a problem in his/her practice, s/he imagines a solution to his/her problem and s/he acts in the direction of the solution. Then s/he evaluates the outcomes of his/her actions and modifies his/her problem, ideas and actions in the light of his/her evaluation (Whitehead, 2006, p. 98). Action research will help us understand our practice better, and it is important for us, as teachers and researchers, to be open, honest and precise.

Our action research concerns the planning of a lesson series involving three different texts which we then evaluate and plan for further actions. Our results will not generate a universal truth, since the project is in our specific to one context, with one specific class. It will not be about certainties. It will help us as teachers and it will give us an understanding which we can offer to other teachers to try. However, other teachers have to focus on his or her context (Waters-Adams, 2006).

Another aspect we have to bear in mind is that the teacher involved in action research is influenced by his/her history, beliefs and values. The outcome of the project might be affected by this, alongside with the students’ histories, beliefs and values of course. In this project we find it important to involve the students in the evaluation. Action research is said to be carried out by individuals but these individuals could work collaboratively. We find it meaningful to hear what the students have to say, since they are a part of the context in which we perform the action research. The more ideas we can gather, the closer we might get to find good and effective ways of working with texts (Waters-Adams, 2006).

It is important to use many methods to be able to illuminate several aspects of the same issue. One method highlights certain things while other methods highlight something different. We
have used triangulation of observations, a questionnaire and interviews in this investigation to be able to ensure that the result is as trustworthy as possible (Waters-Adams, 2006).

3.2 Ethical Considerations

All of the students in this dissertation will be kept anonymous, and have been informed of this prior to the project. We informed the students and the school of the ethical principles of research. These state that the participants need to be informed of the aim of the research, that it is voluntary to participate, that all information about specific individuals will be kept confidential and that the information from the participants only will be used in our dissertation. We also sent letters to the guardians of the students to inform them of the above (appendix 1) (Vetenskapsrådet, 1990).

3.3 Observations

Throughout the project one of us observed and took notes during and subsequent to every lesson. During the observations the observer looked at the students’ reactions and behavior. The four categories that were kept in mind when doing the observations were: the overall atmosphere in the classroom; the students’ reactions to the project, assignments and material; the students’ actions during the work process and the students’ engagement during the work process (appendix 3). We looked at these categories because we find it necessary to look at how the students worked and behaved, among other things, since our evaluation must include how the situation in the classroom worked. Students can express opinions, in the questionnaire and interviews, based on what they think they should answer whilst their actions and reactions can tell us otherwise.

It should be noted that the observer also had the role of the teacher who conducted the project. The observations could therefore have been influenced by the dual role of the observer, concerning objectivity and the time constraints. We have to bear in mind that observations are selective. Other important things could have been said and done, but the teacher/observer might not have seen or heard it. It is also difficult to observe the intentions behind why the students act in a certain way or say certain things. If a student seems to dislike an assignment, it could be affected by other things, such as time of day and what s/he has eaten during the day. It does not have to have anything to do with the assignment being deficient (Observation
3.4 Questionnaire

An evaluation in the form of a questionnaire was conducted with the 23 students in the class at the end of the project. The questionnaire was carried out in order for the students to evaluate the project and tell us their ideas of what could have been done differently. The students had 30 minutes at their disposal to complete the 15 questions in the questionnaire. The three-page questionnaire (appendix 4) contained true-false questions which the students could answer with yes or no. It also had multiple choice questions where the students could circle one or several alternatives. In order to get clarifications and examples, specific open questions were used. The questionnaire also contained scales where the students were asked to indicate their level of awareness and their likes and dislikes (Dörnyei, 2007, pp.105-106).

We asked questions in relation to different themes in order to collect data and get insights on the students’ general opinions about the project as a whole. The questions we asked were related to the following themes: the students’ previous experience of use of texts in the classroom; the students’ perception of how to use texts and how to learn through texts; the students’ evaluation of our project and its different parts; the students’ thoughts on student democracy in general and in this project; the students’ evaluation of their own work effort and the students’ awareness of their own learning style/s. These themes all connect to our research question in the way that they tell us something about how this project worked and how to change it for the future, with the students’ previous experiences in mind. The point of action research, which is our method in this dissertation, is to try something, evaluate it and try it again.

3.5 Interviews

Following the questionnaire, interviews with four students were executed in order to try to receive an in-depth, qualitative response on how the students want to work with a variety of texts in the English classroom (appendix 5, 7, 8). We decided to do the combination of a questionnaire and interviews in order to obtain the general opinions of the project, as well as
to gain information on how the students felt about working with the different texts. The language of choice for both the questionnaire and interviews was Swedish, since the students are more comfortable expressing themselves in that language. We, as researchers, wanted to be assured that the students were free to express themselves in as much detail as possible.

We interviewed four students, two boys and two girls. We gave the students pseudonyms in order for them to be anonymous. The pseudonyms we use are Anna, Olivia, Victor and Benjamin. We thought that it might be beneficial to collect data from students with different proficiency levels of English. This, since teachers need to know how different learners prefer to receive input and produce output. We also need to know this in order for every student to get challenged at his/her level. The managing teacher of the project knew the students prior to the project and was aware of the students’ proficiency levels through their efforts during previous lessons and their grades. The students’ regular teacher also pointed us in the direction of whom to interview. Thus, the interviewees of our choice vary in proficiency of English.

The students were interviewed individually, and both of us, the interviewers, were present in the room. We decided to interview each student individually since we did not want to risk them being influenced by each other’s answers. Our decision on being two interviewers at the same time was based upon us wanting to keep the flow of the conversation, to be able to capture the interviewee’s thoughts and thereby ask him/her to explain, develop or exemplify without losing focus on the aim of the interview. The interviews were semi-structured, since we wanted a conversational tone, but still keep the focus on the research questions we sought to answer. We had a prepared set of questions (appendix 5), but the interviewee was encouraged to elaborate and explain issues outside of the set questions if such issues arose (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136). The questions in the interviews were connected to themes. These themes connect to the questionnaire since we wanted the student to elaborate their thoughts and hopefully give us a more in-depth answer in order for us to be able to answer our research question in a qualitative way. The themes in the interviews were: the students’ previous experience of use of texts in the classroom; the students’ perception of how to use texts and how to learn through texts; the students’ evaluation of our project and its different parts; the students’ thoughts on student democracy in general and in this project; the students’ evaluation of their own work effort; the students’ reflections on their learning experience; the students’ awareness of their own learning style/s and its connection to their results from the VARK© test. These themes all connect to our research question in the way that they give us
an idea of how to use and work with texts in this classroom, with the students’ past in mind, and with this project in mind.

One possible limitation of the interviews could be the fact that one of the interviewers also was the teacher in charge of the lessons in the project and thus a familiar face. Therefore, the interviewees may have felt uneasy to express negative thoughts about the project. The students had only met the other interviewer twice prior to the interviews, which might have made them uncomfortable. However, we could not sense that the students felt uncomfortable in this situation.

All of the interviews were recorded. Prior to each interview, the students were asked if they would mind being recorded. All of the students gave their consent and did not mind it at all. They did not seem to be affected by the recording during the interviews.

The interviews were held in a secluded room in the teachers’ lounge. The room contained a small sofa, a chair, a stool and two small tables. We brought crackers and lemonade in order for the students to feel appreciated. They also received a small, symbolic gift for participating. The first interview started at 9.45 a.m. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All in all, the interviewing lasted until 2.30 p.m., since we had breaks in between most of the interviews as well as a lunch break. The students were interviewed in the following order: Anna, Benjamin, Victor and Olivia. The interviews with Anna and Benjamin might have suffered some because of time-pressure due to the students’ schedule.

In the beginning of each interview, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire on learning styles called VARK© (appendix 6). VARK© was designed by Neil Fleming in 1987. With different questions you can find out whether you have an aural, visual, kinesthetic style or if you learn best by reading or writing. You can prefer one, two or multiple ways of learning. If you have several preferred ways of learning, you are a multimodal person but there are also different multimodal types. One type of multimodal person chooses his or her preferred way according to context. Another multimodal person requires several channels of input or output before they learn anything at all (Fleming, 2006). The reason for including this test was for us to see if and how a student’s preferred learning style/s has any connection to how they want to include and work with texts in the classroom.
4. MATERIALS

4.1 The Students

The students involved in this project are 23 students from an eighth grade class in a medium-sized town in the south of Sweden. The class was chosen due to accessibility. According to their regular teacher the students are at different proficiency levels in English and have a varying degree of motivation for language learning. According to the students, they, themselves, have different experiences from texts in the classroom from prior teaching. Some of them have worked with different texts such as a film before. This is a class with varied experience and proficiency and therefore we decided to involve these students in our action research. Since we, as teachers, probably will experience a multitude of different learners within a class, involving this class might be a beneficial way of becoming aware of how different types of learners want to work with different texts within the same classroom.

4.2 Lesson Material

The material presented to the students was threefold: a book excerpt, a film and a webpage, all related to the same story. The novel version of *Pay It Forward* was written in 1999 by Catherine Ryan Hyde. The film version of the novel started to take form shortly after. The film is the only text, in this project, which contains the entire plot. The story is about a social science teacher, Reuben St. Clair, who challenges his students to try to change the world. One of the students, Trevor McKinney, takes the assignment very seriously and comes up with the idea of “paying it forward”. The phrase to “pay it forward” means that you try to help three different people with things that they cannot do for themselves. Nothing is expected in return except for the three helped persons to “pay it forward” to three other people. The film version is different from the novel on a number of points, but the plot is the same. The most prevalent theme in *Pay It Forward* is helping others, but love and friendship are also important parts of the story.

The webpage <www.payitforwardfoundation.org> was founded by the author Catherine Ryan Hyde together with a couple of other enthusiasts. The purpose of the webpage is to encourage teachers, students and others to try to change the world for the better. There are several links on the webpage, which lead the reader to educator resources, success stories, facts, novel excerpts and a possibility to share your own story. There are also links to other webpages in
connection to this one, namely <www.payitforwardmovement.org> and <www.payitforwardtoday.org>. The former is a collection of real success stories in connection to the idea of Pay It Forward, and the latter is formed as a blog where you can donate money, time or effort to change the world for the better.

One reason for the choice of material to use with our students was the different themes. One of us has had previous experience in teaching through this material and those students found that the film and the book excerpt would suit most young people. The themes seem to be easy to relate to among youths, and the main character, Trevor, is quite close to the age of our students. Another reason was, of course, the fact that the material is available in a variety of texts and that the film version was available at the Audio-Visual Media Center in Scania (AV-Centralen) which makes it legal to use in schools.

4.3 Action Research Project

We planned and evaluated a series of lessons to be able to look into how to use and work with different texts in our English classroom. We decided on the materials for the lesson series prior to the start-up of the project. We wanted to use different texts that were related to the same content, since a threefold of texts might optimize the understanding of the content. Two teachers/researchers were involved in this project, one of which was present during the entire lesson series and one of which was present during the introductory lesson and lesson 6.

4.3.1 Introductory lesson

During the introductory lesson we introduced three different texts. These were a book excerpt from the book Pay It Forward by Catherine Ryan Hyde and the complementary film, together with the webpage for the Pay It Forward Foundation. Using a Smartboard, we showed the trailer from the film and then the students were given an oral presentation about the idea of “paying it forward”. Secondly, we displayed the webpage and its contents. We also let the book excerpt and the original novel circulate in the classroom. Following the presentation of the material we asked the students to discuss possible ideas for assignments as well as how and what material to work with. The students were given the syllabus for English in order to try to apply some of the goals to strive for into the project. The reason for this start-up was to
get the students thinking about how to work with texts. At the end of the lesson, each group presented their ideas for the project and these were written on the board (appendix 2). Consequently, with the students’ ideas in mind, a lesson plan was designed by us.

These are the goals that the students strove for throughout this project when working with the texts and the assignments.

Reception:

- The students should develop their ability to read different types of texts for pleasure and to obtain information and knowledge (the three texts: film, book excerpt and webpage).

- The students should deepen their understanding of spoken English in different situations and contexts (film).

Production:

- The students should develop their ability to use English orally in different contexts in order to relate, describe and explain, as well as give reasons for their views (presentations).

- The students should develop their ability to express themselves with variety and confidence in writing in order to relate, describe and explain, as well as give reasons for their views (summary, poster, book vs. film, manuscript).

Interaction:

- The students should develop their ability to reflect over and take responsibility for their own language learning and consciously use different ways of working to support their own learning.

- The students should develop their ability to plan, carry out and evaluate tasks on their own and in co-operation with others.

The goals explain what the students should attain but not how well. The students were able to show their level of language proficiency in connection to the assignments by including or not including conclusions and comparisons. The students also had the possibility to illustrate their
level of proficiency by demonstrating strategies for language difficulties, adjustment to receivers, fluency, variation and by being able to produce both holistic and detailed ideas (Skolverket 2000:07).

4.3.2 Lesson 1-2

In the beginning of the first lesson the students were informed about what the lesson plan would contain. All of the activities were described shortly in order for the students to have a sense of what was going to be carried out during the following weeks. Since we had planned for the students to watch the entire film, with Swedish subtitles, this is what we started with and continued doing during the second lesson the next day. We instructed the students to take notes during the film since they were to write a one-page summary afterwards. The summary was assigned as homework for the following week. It was to contain a description of the content of the film as well as an explanation of the idea of “paying it forward”.

4.3.3 Lesson 3-4

In the beginning of the third lesson, the students were presented with three assignments to choose from. These were connected to the different texts presented during the introductory lesson. In addition to this, they should seek to develop the different skills within the communicative competences. The assignments were:

1. Compare the book excerpt and the corresponding scene from the film.
2. Make a poster where you present the Pay It Forward idea and promote it.
3. Dramatize one or a few scenes from the film.

The teacher explained the forms of presentation for the assignments as well as the due-date:

2. Present the content of the poster, what you want to achieve with it to the class and hand in the poster – in lesson 6.
3. Show your scene/s in front of the class and hand in your manuscript – in lesson 6.
After being introduced to the assignments, the students chose an assignment, formed groups and started working. The work continued during the following lesson. The material was available to the students at all times.

4.3.4 Lesson 5

The boys continued to work with their assignments, while the girls were away on girl camp. This was the final lesson and the last opportunity to work with the assignments in school.

4.3.5 Lesson 6

We started this lesson with a recap of the project, since one of the researchers only attended the introductory lesson. The other researcher had been the teacher in the project.

We asked the students to inform us of what assignment they had worked with. All of the groups were listed on the whiteboard and later on, arranged in an order for presentations. The different groups presented their work and the written assignments were handed in.

After the presentations we thanked the students for their participation in the project. Then we asked the students if they were willing to complete a questionnaire. All of the students agreed and when the questionnaire was completed, they were excused.
5. RESULTS
In a class with 23 students we planned, carried out and evaluated a lesson series involving three different texts related to the same content. We used various methods to be able evaluate how the project went and how it can be altered for next time. We wanted to know how the students want to work with texts in the classroom, since teaching and learning are intertwined. A triangulation of observations (appendix 3), a questionnaire with the entire class (appendix 4) and interviews with four students (appendix 5, 7, 8) provided us with an idea of how to use and work with these texts in our English classroom.

5.1 Observations
The observation schedule (appendix 3) had four categories for us to take into consideration when we observed the classroom activity and the reactions within it. However, we decided to categorize the results from the observations in categories of the different lessons as it may provide an overview of the lesson series. With this categorization the observations will probably be more easily relatable to the explanation of what each lesson contained.

5.1.1 Introductory lesson
During the introductory lesson the students seemed surprised and excited to engagement in the upcoming project. They also seemed content to be chosen as participants in our dissertation. The students asked many questions and seemed eager to start and to engage in the activities during our presentation of the project and the material. The trailer from the film seemed to be the piece of material that appealed the most to the students. Throughout the group discussions they worked hard and appeared to take it seriously.

Some of the students had a hard time focusing during the introductory lesson. They did not seem to be as engaged as the others during our presentations. When the group discussions started some of them had problems with the group constellations.
5.1.2 Lesson 1-2

When introducing the plan for the upcoming weeks the class appeared to listen carefully and had a lot of questions. They seemed happy with the structure of the project and the different assignments. Some of the students were quite energized and verbal which, at some points during the lesson, created a negative atmosphere. When they watched the film some of them took notes frequently while some did not. Most of the students were attentive towards the film, while some seemed to see it more like a moment of recreation.

When a love scene was screened some of the students looked embarrassed, laughed a little and started talking to each other. When a scene with rough character, like a bullying scene or the death of the main character, occurred they seemed to take it lightly instead of acting respectful. The students laughed and made cruel jokes.

5.1.3 Lesson 3-4

During these lessons the students engaged in the assignments and were attentive and inquisitive towards the presentation of the three options. The students started working immediately and had no problems with forming groups. They seemed to take the assignments seriously, even though some of the groups who worked with drama were quite loud and acted silly at times. Some of the students did the assignments rather fast and just scribbled something down on a piece of paper. One of the students asked several times whether you could get the same grade if you did the dramatization as if you did the written assignment. He seemed to believe that a written text is worth more than acting. This was denied by the teacher, who explained that all of the assignments could yield the same grades. The overall impression was that the class enjoyed working with this and that they chose the most enjoyable assignment according to themselves.

5.1.4 Lesson 5

During this lesson the boys were alone in the classroom, since the girls were away at girl camp. Some of the boys worked rather well, but most of them took the opportunity to act out in the classroom. This was the last lesson the students could work with the assignments – a fact that some of them seemed to ignore. Because of the time-frame some students had quite a
lot to do at home prior to the presentations for lesson 6. However, three of the groups finished.

5.1.5 Lesson 6

During the final lesson the students seemed attentive towards what the teachers had to say. They seemed quite anxious when one of the teachers decided on an order for the presentations, since no one wanted to go first. The presentations went by quite quickly. The assignments were good in terms of creativity, language and content but the presentations of them were a bit poor both in terms of language, content and seriousness.

This is the distribution of students for each assignment:

Poster: 10
Drama: 9
Book. vs. Film: 4

After the presentations we asked the students if they would mind completing a questionnaire. The students agreed to answer the questionnaire. During the questionnaire the students appeared to understand the questions, and were not afraid to ask if something was unclear. They seemed to understand the value for us, as researchers, to get honest answers from them. Most of the students took their time to complete it, and did not seem to rush through the questions.

5.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was completed at the end of the last lesson, just after the group presentations and the handing in of the assignments. 14 boys and nine girls completed the questionnaire, all together 23 students. The questionnaire was thematically organized through the following categories: the students’ previous experience of use of texts in the classroom; the students’ perception of how to use texts and how to learn through texts; the students’ evaluation of our project and its different parts; the students’ evaluation of their own work effort and the students’ awareness of their own learning style/s. The results that follow will not be stated under these headings. However, it will follow the themes in a body of text.
All of the students were positive towards our project. 20 of them thought it was “quite good” or “very good” while three liked it “a little”. Just over half of the students resented the idea of changing anything in the project. The suggestions for change that did come up were to engage in discussions, to skip the summary, to do alternative writing tasks, to have fewer assignments and to watch the entire film all at once and not on two separate occasions. One student suggested that all students should have received the same task instead of being able to choose from three options.

19 out of 23 were positive to using various texts, in this case written text, a film and a webpage, in the classroom. In this project the film was the main text and all of our students believe that you can learn something from watching a film. Their thoughts on what could be learned through watching a film are pronunciation, vocabulary, to speak better, expressions and the content of the film. 22 out of 23 students had watched film during English lessons before. Of these 22, all except one were positive.

In two of the questions, number five and 14, the students could circle more than one alternative. When being asked what kind of subtitles to use “Swedish subtitles” was circled 15 times, “English subtitles” was circled eight times and “no subtitles” was circled ten times. All of the students wanted to engage in some kind of activity in connection to the film/the texts. A majority of the students wanted to engage in discussions. Reading in connection to the film was circled seven times and writing was circled four times.

When the students thought about how they learn best, they chose from the following categories: individually, in group, through reading, through writing, through experimenting, through listening and through viewing. There was an even distribution between all of the categories, except experimenting which was favored less. Boys seemed to circle more than one alternative, while the girls circled fewer alternatives.

We asked the students if their awareness of how they believe they learn best affected their choice of assignment during our project. A majority of the students put themselves between “a little” and “quite a lot” on the scale. Two students put themselves on “not at all” and two on “a lot”.

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5.3 Interviews

We conducted interviews with four students, Anna, Olivia, Benjamin and Victor, all with varying proficiency in English. We decided to view the interviews from different time perspectives: an evaluation of the project and suggestions for the future and then into further sub-headings related to the previous mentioned categories. This since action research strives to engage in a project, reflect on the outcome and decide on a new improved action. The quotes from the interviews are our translations, since the interviews were held in Swedish.

5.3.1 Evaluation of our project

5.3.1.1 General attitudes

All of the interviewed students thought our project had been a positive experience. Most of the things in the project had been good, and nothing seemed to have been specifically boring or unsatisfying. When we asked Anna what she would have liked to change she said that “what we had was good. I would probably have done it the same way”.

The students seemed to appreciate the variation that the project provided. Victor pointed it out when he said "not to do only one thing, to do many different (things) - that was good". Olivia agreed that the variation was good, since it gave the students many options to choose from when they would start working with the assignments. She mentioned that you could chose "an alternative that fits" and "(one) which you think is fun".

One student pointed out that it was positive to have more than one text type since the understanding can be enhanced. If one text does not fit one specific student very well, another text type can be better for that student. Benjamin stated that “[…] if you did not understand the movie properly or if you did not understand everything, you could also go to the webpage and check.”

All of the students claimed to have learned something during the project. Victor pointed out that the film was the main source for his learning. Another thing that he claimed to have learned was to collaborate better in groups.

The only thing that seemed to have been negative about the project was the lack of time in terms of finishing the assignments.
5.3.1.2 Introductory lesson

The students seemed to have enjoyed the introductory lesson. Anna mentioned that it was positive for them to be able to see and relate to the syllabus for English prior to engaging in the lesson planning. She expressed it as then you know “what you need to do” in the subject. Victor also liked the fact that they were able to see the goals for English, instead of just having them read out loud or restated by the teacher.

Benjamin thought that the viewing of the trailer was a good starting point of the lesson series and the planning of the same since it provided the students with an idea of the content and what type of film it was.

5.3.1.3 Film/text

All of the students seemed to think that our choice of film was good. They said that it was a film that fits all kinds of people, not only boys or only girls. Olivia also added that all of the students in the class seemed to have enjoyed the film. The content of the film was rewarding and, as Anna commented, “you want to follow it (the film)”.

The interviewees stated that they had learned something in connection to the film/texts, and mentioned things like new words, expressions, better pronunciation of words, but also that the content of the film had taught them something. Some of the interviewees also related what they learned from our project to the textbooks that they use on a daily basis. In this comparison the interviewee, Anna, pondered on the thought of “what they say in films are more often things that you use (in real life) than what is expressed in school books”. Anna continued her reasoning about textbooks, and said that “you do not have to sit with books and study just because you are in school. You could do something fun of school […] because then you learn more.” As stated previously, all of the interviewees found that the variation that the project inferred was positive. One interviewee reasoned in terms of that if a lesson is “fun, then you learn better”. Another interviewee expressed that if something is “different and fun” then he learns “a lot better”.

5.3.1.4 Summary

All of the interviewees thought that writing a summary was a good task in relation to the film. Anna also pointed out that it was positive to take notes during the viewing of the film. One
reason for why the summary was viewed upon as something good boils down to, according one of the interviewed students, the fact that it can help you learn more than from only viewing the film. Both Anna and Olivia thought in terms of the need to look up words in dictionaries. Olivia also continued her reasoning by stating that you may have errors in your summary, but that those errors can help you. Anna thought that she learned just about as much from the film as from writing the summary.

5.3.1.5 Assignments

All of the four interviewees seemed to have thought that it was satisfactory to be able to plan and wish for certain assignments in connection to the texts. Benjamin thought that it was not just the teacher who should decide on what assignments they could work with. He also thought that if the students could take part in the planning and deciding it would probably “feel better for [them]”. The fact that they were able to choose from three options of assignments was something that the interviewees found as a positive thing, since they could choose what they liked the most. Anna said that if there are choices everyone can do something that suits them better, both in terms of if it is fun and if it fits that person’s preferred way of working. She, herself, preferred to write texts but she also knows that there are those who prefer to speak and perform. In addition to this some of the students also found it valuable to be able to choose a way of working where they really could show their abilities to the teacher, whether it was through writing or speaking. As Olivia put it: “you might be better at drama, but I might be better at writing”. She also said that “[...] I think it’s good to choose, because not all teachers allow that. [...]”.

Two of the students discussed the assignments in relation to what doing them had to offer in terms of learning. Anna, who made a poster, found that she had learned new words and spelling. Victor, who dramatized a scene from the film, felt that he had learned when to use certain words in certain contexts. He also felt that he had learned to take more responsibility.

There were some points made about the less positive parts of the project. Anna called for more time on the assignments, both to do them and to prepare the presentations. She felt that the presentation suffered because of the limited time-frame. Victor felt that drama was a nice, new way of working. Though, he was concerned by the fact that doing a dramatization might not be as highly-valued by the teacher in terms of assessment.
5.3.2 Future

During the interviews we asked our four eight grade students to tell us what they would have done differently and how they would have planned the perfect lesson. They did not want to change many things but they had thoughts and suggestions.

5.3.2.1 Film/text

The four students seemed positive towards the use of different texts, but they all had different ideas of how to work with them. Anna believed that film is good, but written text could be used to find facts. The students also said that different kinds of texts and in this case the film is good since it provides variation to the activities in the classroom and Olivia said that “[…]you learn a lot, but you do not think about it […]” All of the students touched upon the fact that film is fun and if something is fun, you learn more. Victor also stated that, for him, the film is easier to take in than for example a written text since he does not have to have many things on his mind at the same time. He finds it difficult to imagine how everything looks and to read a text at the same time. The students all agreed on being able to learn something from different texts and especially film and Benjamin said that he thinks that “it should be used more for learning”.

The students felt that it is important to engage in other activities in connection to the texts. Anna said that “if you only watch a film, there is not that many that would care”. Instead, she felt that the students would care if they got assignments in connection to the film. The students had many suggestions of what activities to use. You could for example, when being presented to new vocabulary, look at short episodes of a film containing the vocabulary. Afterwards you could translate the words and talk about them. Anna felt that she learns more in this way than when she only works with a unimodal text.

When talking about the film, all students felt that to watch the entire film is most rewarding. Parts could be good as well but they agree that they want to use full-length films. The film should also be watched all at one time. Olivia mentioned that it would be rewarding to vote on what film to watch. Coming to content she, and the others, found it important that the content fits both boys and girls. Benjamin talked about the importance of watching a film that is close to reality and Victor thought that it is important that the film contains conversation. He did not think that an action movie, which contains a lot of shooting, is good for learning. He also
talked about it being difficult to understand documentaries, and that films like *Pay It Forward*, feature films, should be used.

There was diversity concerning the use of subtitles in the film. Two students wanted to have Swedish subtitles. Anna thought that there should be subtitles if you are to take notes, otherwise not. But she also discussed that it depends on “if you know (English), if you have difficulties it would not be fun to watch a film and not understand”. Victor felt that it is important to watch an English film, it should not be dubbed. He did not want to use any subtitles because he thinks that you learn more without the subtitles. He stated that “you think about what they say and the film more. If you just read the subtitles I do not think you take in as much”. Olivia thought that when watching a full-length film, you should have Swedish subtitles. Then she said that when watching shorter episodes, English subtitles could be used since you can stop after a few minutes and talk about what happened.

5.3.2.2 Assignments

All students seemed positive towards implementing student democracy. As Olivia said, the students do not think it is equally fun and engaging if they have not been a part of the process. All of the students thought that it is good to write a summary after watching a film. Victor and Anna wanted to take notes during the film to be able to do this and thus make it more valuable for learning. Benjamin said that he wants the summary to be written in English. Anna said that she likes to write long texts and she thinks that more of these should be used. But she also stated that it could be different for different people. “Some people like to present something and to talk, many people in our class like to talk and then it is better to do stuff like that, so both can be good. If you did not get the chance to show what you can do in a written assignment, you get the chance to show it by talking”.

The other students also touched upon the topic of discussion. Benjamin and Olivia wanted to have discussions but Olivia said that it depends on the length of the film. If it is a short film, discussions could be used, but for longer films, summaries are better. Victor also wanted to have discussions and he had an idea of how to discuss. The discussion should mostly be about the content of the film but then you could “[…] take a scene from the film that lasts for about five minutes and then you have to talk about what they said and stuff like that”. Victor also
believed that you should discuss in groups and not in the entire class. When having a discussion in class, he believed that people do not talk as much.

The students seemed pleased with most of the assignments. Victor liked the idea of the poster and the book vs. film assignment. The only thing most of the students would add was discussions. Victor also talked about the idea of writing a longer essay about the film. Victor added an idea of creating a play with scenes from the film but he was concerned about the time it would take. The idea was for the entire class to make a long play which they could show to another class or to the parents. It was important for everybody to talk, “[…] you should not sit all quiet […]”. Olivia had a similar idea where all of the students are involved in a big play. The class should be divided into different groups and watch approximately five minutes of the film per group. No one should watch more than their own scene. After watching, the students would then dramatize their scene to the class and all groups together would then form the entity of the film.

The students’ thoughts on how they, themselves, want to work seem to be influenced by how they think they learn best. Anna talked about how she likes to write and that is because she “feels more comfortable with it”. She also stated that she does not like to read, because when she reads in the classroom she cannot concentrate. Therefore, she uses writing as a complement to be able to learn. Benjamin likes to read, write and to watch. Victor thinks he learns best through different steps. First he wants to watch and then listen. Then he wants to try it to see if it works. Someone should then tell him what he did right and what he could have done better. Olivia also wanted to test things. Victor thought that he learns this way because he just “has it in him” and this is how he “learns the fastest”. He believed that in schools today, there are not many subjects in which he can try things. Rather, there is a focus on watching someone else do it.

During the interview Anna said that she likes to work both in groups and individually. Benjamin talked about the fact that he learns best on his own since he needs to concentrate. Victor thought that it depends on what it is he is supposed to learn. If he is supposed study for a test he likes to work on his own because he needs the focus and to forget everything around him. Olivia also liked to work on her own, since she wants to be able to decide everything, and she cannot do that in a group, she says.

In the beginning of each interview the four students completed a test called VARK© (see chapter 3 and appendix 6). Prior to revealing the test results we discussed what the students
found the most beneficial way of working in relation to their learning outcome. Subsequently, the results were revealed. Then we discussed the students’ awareness, or lack of the same, of their, according to the test, preferred learning style. Victor stated that he liked to learn things in steps, in this case by viewing, listening and finally doing. His results from the VARK© test pointed in the same direction. There was an even distribution between the three learning styles, visual, aural, and kinesthetic. The category of read/write was favored less according to the test. Victor said that he is quite aware of how he wants to learn, and states that “I think I know myself rather well”. Olivia expressed that she prefers to try and experiment in a learning situation. This also corresponded well with the results from the VARK© test. The kinesthetic learning style was her strongest point, but there was still a tendency towards a mixture of learning styles, according to the test. In the interview she said that she was aware of how she learns the best. Benjamin preferred to read, write and view in order to learn. The results claim that Benjamin learns through a mixture of learning styles, and Benjamin himself supported this by saying that he likes “a little bit of everything”. Throughout the interview Anna declared that she prefers to write, and that this helps her to learn. The results of VARK© differed from this, since it pointed towards Anna being mostly aural. When this was revealed she thought it might be accurate, since she reckoned she can remember what most people say.
6. DISCUSSION

The aim of this dissertation was to explore how we can use texts and develop ways of working with texts in an English classroom with an eighth grade class. There are many different texts, and thus we had to focus on three specific texts in this project to make it feasible within the time-frame of the project as well as for a 15 credit dissertation. The point of action research is not to view your action, in this case the teaching, as something static. Rather, you should look at it as something that is in need of constant reflection and development. The themes in the discussion highlight different parts of the project that we found meaningful to discuss due to the results from the triangulation of methods. The overarching theme is an evaluation of our project and within this we look at: general opinions about the project; text use; film as a text in the classroom; ways of working with texts; learning styles; evaluation of the goals in this project and reflections for the future. The theme of film as a text in the classroom became evident due to the students' opinions about its relevance for learning and due to the role of the film of Pay It Forward in this project. This text was the only text out of the three introduced which contained the entire plot and could be read within a manageable time-frame.

6.1 General Opinions

The students seemed surprised when introduced to the project. We believe that this had to do with them not being used to engaging in assignments which contain different kinds of texts. The questionnaire showed that a majority of the students found the project positive. This was confirmed by the interviewees who also added that the variation throughout the project was highly appreciated. We believe, and the students verified with their expressed thoughts, that they thought that their motivation and the level of engagement were enhanced due to the variation in the project. In retrospect, we find that the project could have suffered from lack of time since we had fewer lessons than expected.

6.2 Text Use

We strove to use texts according to a participatory approach. Our aim was to make the students co-constructors of their knowledge and the teaching not only teacher-centered (Wade & Moje, 2000). We included a wide range of texts in order for the students to have the opportunity to construct their knowledge through different sources of texts. We tried to create
room for interpretation within each assignment. The intention behind this was for the students to decide on what they found important and thus what to include or exclude in their productions. Some parts of the project, for instance the summary, show traces of the transmission approach. A mixture of the two approaches seems appropriate since we do have to make sure that all students understand and develop.

We decided on three texts being adequate in this situation, but more texts could have been beneficial. 19 out of 23 students were positive towards using different texts in teaching and one student pointed to the fact that it was positive to have more than one text type since understanding can be enhanced. If one text does not offer a complete understanding, an additional text with the same content might help since students learn in different ways. During one of the interviews, one student said that if there are choices everyone can do something that suits them better, both in terms of if it is fun and if it fits that person’s preferred way of working. We believe that a student chooses what s/he think is fun, which supposedly is based on the way s/he learns best and the other way around. The researchers Boström and Kroksmark suggests that achievement and motivation are enhanced when the teaching is based on the students’ individual and preferred learning style or styles which is in line with our results (Boström & Kroksmark, 2005, pp. 39-41).

6.3 Film as Text in the Classroom

Out of the three texts that we introduced to the students, it was the film that seemed to appeal to the majority of the class. The film was the only text that illustrated the entire plot and thus seemed to function as a platform from which the students could engage in the other texts and assignments. One of the interviewees pointed to the fact that the film was the main source for his learning. Film is a common text in the literary repertoires of our students and was therefore viewed as the main text for this project. Film is also a multimodal text, which is another factor for why we viewed it as the main text in this project.

A text could be brought in for different purposes. Olin-Scheller, who looked at film use in classrooms, distinguished three categories of usage: film as illustration, film as supplement and film as comparison. We cannot “fit” our screening of the film into these categories. Instead we try to use film as a product of art on its own which also is what Olin-Scheller suggests in terms of usage of film in the classroom (Olin-Scheller, 2006, p. 112).
The students in this project believed that different texts, for example film, should be used more for learning, since it provides variation to the activities in the classroom and “[…] you learn a lot, but you do not think about it […]”. One of the students also stated that he learns a lot better when the teaching and the material is varied and fun. Previous research suggested that when moving images, such as television and film, are included in teaching, students seemed to work more creatively and the assignments seemed to be done with more innovation and enthusiasm (Burns, 2006, p. 37). In our project the students seemed eager to start and engage in the different parts of the project. We think that this has to do with the fact that the project provided them with variety and closeness to their literary repertoires. Olin-Scheller examined four classrooms in which she found that the literary repertoires of the teacher and the students often collided rather than matched. The students stated that they are used to watching film and that it is something that they enjoy doing. We tried to match our students’ literary repertoires with the texts we used in order for them to become more motivated (Olin-Scheller, 2006, pp. 215, 237). One of the interviewees touched upon this when she expressed that the students should be able to have a say on what text to use in the classroom. Another interviewee, said that “what they say in films are more often things that you use (in real life) than what is expressed in school books”. This ties in to the idea of the film being a text that the students are familiar with and a text from which students might learn useful language skills which are connected to their reality.

Film is a part of the students’ literary repertoires but mostly outside of school. Nevertheless, the students believed that films should be used for learning in an educational setting. However, the screening of Pay It Forward was not as successful as we had hoped. The students talked a lot and did not seem to care when awful things in the film happened. They laughed and made jokes. Some students took notes, but far from all did this. When compiling the questionnaire and the interviews, we found that most students had enjoyed the film, and thought that it was an excellent film to use for learning. This was a bit surprising in the light of how they acted during the screening of the film. Olin-Scheller also discussed the atmosphere of film screening since she could sense a change in the behavior of the students. We believe that the atmosphere changes because the students are used to watching film as entertainment and not for the sake of learning. The students need to become accustomed to using film for learning and the situation must be different from the one at home (Persson, 2000, pp. 78-79). The reading of the text becomes more focused and valuable if it is clear to the students what they are expected to take in, in terms of learning (Olin-Scheller, 2006, p.
112). We, together with these students, feel that is important to engage in activities in connection to the texts. This could be done through assignments in connection to the language, content, common values and so on. In this project, one of the interviewees said that “if you only watch a film, there is not that many that would care”. All four interviewees agreed on the benefits of connecting the film to assignments.

6.4 Ways of Working with Texts

In our project the students engaged in activities in connection to the texts. The assignments in the project were looked upon as positive from the students’ point of view. However, the students wanted to include other activities, namely discussions, an alternative writing task and a play containing the entire plot of the story.

In hindsight, discussions would have been a good choice since the productive skills that were emphasized did not include the parameters of expressing your own thoughts orally. In addition to this, discussions are interactive which can help develop the students’ abilities to listen to and to understand the views and experiences of others. One of the interviewees wished to have the opportunity to write a story instead of the comparative task. We feel that a story could have been included since the content of Pay It Forward contains basic ideas to form a creative text from. However, we wanted to add another layer which in this case meant making a comparison and defining arguments. The students in this class are used to writing stories and we wanted to vary the teaching, learning and the skills they develop. We wanted to decide on the tasks in the light of the past teaching and learning (Skolverket, 2000:07). The idea of producing a play containing the entire plot was a really good suggestion. This shows that students have ideas that teachers could implement in the classroom and that the teaching could profit by.

The forms of presentations for the assignments were quite satisfactory. The form that needed most improvement was the dramatization. The eight grade class in our project had not worked with drama in the English classroom before which could have affected the work process and the outcome of the presentations. This suggests that it is necessary to implement different ways of working in the classroom to make students more versatile. Practice is key in all assignments since we cannot expect students to be naturally successful in new ways of working. In addition to practice and variation, the students sometimes need to be provided with more scaffolding from the teacher. We should have provided the drama groups with
more thorough instructions and scaffolding. In hindsight, all of the groups could have benefited from more scaffolding. However, too much structure and guidelines might not leave room for creativity and risk taking. The decision on what scaffolding and how much scaffolding to provide has to be decided on from project to project. It depends on context, assignment and student.

The overall impression was that the class enjoyed working with a variety of texts and that they chose the most enjoyable assignment according to themselves. Several students discussed the importance of being able to choose an assignment that suits you best. In the steering documents it is stressed that students should take active part in, and influence their own learning and the planning of the same (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2009). This in turn could result in higher motivation and awareness. However, it is still important for the teacher to make sure that the students develop all of their skills and not only the one that they prefer. This can be done in a multitude of ways and is dependent upon the set of students and the material.

6.5 Learning Styles

In the questionnaire and interviews we asked the students to think about how they learn best. The students could relate their thoughts to the following categories: individually, in group, through reading, through writing, through experimenting, through listening and through viewing. The results from the questionnaire show that there was an even distribution between all of the categories. However, the category of learning through experimenting was favored less. This shows that there is a possibility that one can find a variety of learning styles within this class, which points to a possible need of implementing a diversity of texts containing different modes. If we look at the distribution of what the students chose in terms of assignments (see chapter 5.1.5), we can see that there was diversity in how the students wanted to engage in activities subsequent to the input. This indicates a need of implementing different assignments.

During the interviews the students were asked to complete the VARK© test. The results of the test might not be reliable since a student’s learning style is dependent upon factors such as context and assignment. Although, it might still show us in the direction of how the students prefers to learn. The interviewees seemed quite aware of how they learn best. They stated that they preferred to learn through different modes depending on factors such as context. This
leads to the conclusion that these students prefer different ways of receiving input in different situations. Fleming, the constructor of the VARK© test, says that the context has an effect on the preferred ways of receiving input among learners. Fleming also states that some students might require several modes of input in order for learning to take place (Fleming, 2006). One of the interviewees explained that he learns in this way, but that it also depends on what he is supposed to learn. The researchers Dunn & Dunn also talked about that environment, sociological factors, emotional factors and type of assignments influence the way you learn (Dunn & Dunn, 1993, pp. 3-4).

In a class of 25 students there can be several preferred learning styles. Within each student there can be several preferred learning styles depending on factors such as type of assignment and context. This suggests that there is a lot to gain if the teacher provides the students with different texts and ways of working with texts. When we think about all of the variables that should influence the choice of material and teaching methods we find that there might be a lot to gain if we choose a variety of texts with different modes or a multimodal text. A multimodal text contains many different modes and could therefore attract more learners. A film is an example of a multimodal text and in this project it was the text that most students liked to work with and they saw it as an effective source for learning. Previous research on multimodality suggests that learning is enhanced if visual modes are added to verbal modes. Fadel’s research indicates that students who work with materials that contain different modalities learn more than students who only use, for example, a unimodal text (Fadel, 2008, p. 14). The outcome of the use of the film in our eighth grade classroom suggested beneficial effects since the students found it fun, that it provided variety and the students believed to have learned something. However, the learning outcome can unfortunately not be measured in this dissertation. We do not think that these benefits could have been possible without engaging in activities in connection to the film.

6.6 Evaluation of the Goals in this Project

We feel that we have worked towards the goals set for this project. We worked with different texts and spoken English, concerning both input and output. The students also worked with developing their ability to express themselves with variety and confidence. We helped our students to reflect on their own learning, to use different aids and ways of working to support their learning. In addition to this, the students planned, carried out and evaluated tasks on their
own and in co-operation with others. We believe that the students have worked towards all of the goals but there can still be improvement in terms of reaching an even higher level within each of the goals.

6.7 The Future

For the future we want to work with several different texts in our classrooms since it seemed successful. We want to work with texts by bringing in different texts with different modes, all of which are related to the same content. We want to do this in order for the texts to complement each other. All of the students should work with all of the texts but if they learn better through one of them, they should be able to use that angle to maybe enhance the understanding of the other texts.

The students in this project received input through three different texts. The input was then reconstructed into a summary, poster, drama and a writing task. We believe that it is important to engage in activities which help the students to reconstruct their knowledge in relation to the texts. It is important to not only receive but to put it into production and interaction. It is also important to provide varied assignments to make sure that the students are able to develop all of the skills.

For next time, we feel that we should scaffold more and include a more interactive way of working. We would also like to improve the way in which we focus and develop the four skills, reading, listening, speaking and writing. For instance, we could have had discussions about the texts and through this let the students work with their speaking skills, and thus the interaction. Even if we would change these things for next time, other things might have to be changed since teaching and learning is a dynamic, constant process and depends on context.
7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate ways of using texts and develop ways of working with texts in an English classroom. Our research question asked how the three different text types in our project could be implemented and worked with in our English classroom with our eighth grade students. We tried to answer this question by engaging in an action research project where we planned, carried out and evaluated a series of lessons. We asked the students to participate in the evaluation since teaching and learning are intertwined.

After this project, we can conclude that in this classroom we want to use a variety of texts, on the same content and at the same time. If we use texts related to the same content but with different modes, the different learning styles might be met and the texts can complement each other in the learning process. The multimodal text, in this case the film, seemed to be beneficial since it already contains different modes.

In this project we tried to use texts which were close to the literary repertoires of our students. When doing this, the students felt that the learning situation was connected to their reality outside of the educational setting. Another factor that the students pinpointed was that if their literary repertoires were implemented in the classroom their motivation was enhanced. Our students also said that motivation was enhanced since variation of texts was included.

The choice of texts also seems to be dependent upon the students’ learning styles and how they believe they learn best. Our students said that they chose a text that provided a mode in which they prefer to learn.

This project illustrated that one way of working with the three texts is to connect them to assignments. The students claim that assignments are valuable and we believe that they will process the input through engagement in assignments. We believe that it is important to include a variety of assignments to make sure that the students are able to develop all of the skills. When using input to produce output the students might reconstruct the knowledge and hopefully make it their own.

As stated above, some parts of the project felt rewarding for our students as well as for us. However, we would change some things for the future. We saw the need for more scaffolding throughout the different parts of the project. Another improvement would be to see to that all of the skills in relation to the communicative competences are developed. We need to make sure that both production and interaction are a part of the reconstruction of the input.
Our action research took place in a specific context, with specific learners and with a specific material. Due to this, the conclusions that we make cannot be generalized. Materials and teaching methods have to be adjusted to the context of teaching. We try to pay our ideas forward but we want teachers to try new ideas and do investigations in their own contexts. Teaching is a dynamic and constant process, which leads to the need for reflection before and after every lesson or project. At all times, teachers have to have an open mind and implement new ideas and develop possible ways of teaching.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Kära elever och föräldrar i klass X,

Vi, Caroline Larsson och Sara Hansson Nygren, är två lärarkandidater från Malmö Högskola som just nu skriver vårt examensarbete inom ämnet engelska. Under ett par veckors tid har vi hållit i engelskundervisningen utifrån ett visst material. Efter detta projekt vill vi genomföra enkäter i klassen och är väldigt intresserade utav att veta mer om vad eleverna tyckte om undervisningen. Därför behöver vi fyra elever som är intresserade utav att delta i intervjuer med oss. Intervjuerna kommer att ske på skoltid och eleverna kommer att få ersättning som tack för hjälpen. Vi kommer givetvis att följa de forskningsetiska principerna och till exempel inte ange namn eller skola i uppsatsen, eleverna kommer att hållas anonyma. Vi behöver enligt lag målsmans tillåtelse för att era ungdomar ska få medverka och ber er skicka tillbaka nedanstående lapp med era barn.

Tack på förhand!

Caroline & Sara

☐ Ja, mitt barn får delta

☐ Nej, jag vill inte att mitt barn ska delta.

Elevens namn: ____________________________________________

Målsmans underskrift: __________________________________
Appendix 2
Appendix 3

Observation schedule

Lesson:

Overall atmosphere in the classroom

The students’ reactions to the project, assignments and material

The students’ actions during the work process

The students’ engagement during the work process
Appendix 4

Enkät Pay it Forward

Efter att detta område är avslutat vill vi nu veta vad du tyckte om att använda filmen, internetsidan och boken i undervisningen. Vi tackar redan nu för ditt svar! // Caroline och Sara

Ringa in det svar som passar dig bäst.

Kille Tjej

1. Tycker du att man kan lära sig något av att se på film i undervisningen?
   Ja Nej

2. Om ja, vad tycker du att man kan lära sig?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. Har du tittat på film någon gång tidigare i engelskundervisningen?
   Ja Nej

4. Om ja:
   Var det positivt eller negativt?
   Positivt Negativt

5. Hur tycker du man ska använda film i undervisningen? (du kan ringa in flera svar)
Undertexter: svenska engelska inga undertexter

Tillsammans med: läsning skrivande diskussioner inget

Om annat vad: __________________________________________________________

6. Har du stött på film och text kombinerat i engelskundervisningen tidigare?
   Ja Nej

Vårt projekt Pay it Forward

7. Har du tyckt att detta projekt varit bra? (sätt ett kryss på linjen)
   Ja, mycket bra Ja, ganska bra Ja, lite Nej, inte bra alls

   __________________________________________________________

8. Vad skulle du ha velat göra annorlunda?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

9. Vad tyckte du om att använda flera olika typer av texter (film och bok)?
   Positivt Negativt

10. Har du fått vara med och planera lektioner tidigare?
    Ja Nej

11. Hur var det att själv få komma med förslag till lektionsplaneringen?
    Positivt Negativt
12. Fick du igenom något/några förslag?
   Ja, flera          Ja, ett          Nej, inget

13. Har du gjort ditt bästa under detta projekt? *(sätt ett kryss på linjen)*
   Nej          Ja

   I grupp          Enskilt          Genom läsning          Genom att skriva
   Genom experiment/att pröva själv          Genom att lyssna          Genom att se
   Om annat, vad?

15. Tänkte du på hur du lär dig bäst när du valde vad du ville arbeta med under projektet?
   *(sätt ett kryss på linjen)*
   Inte alls          lite          ganska mycket          mycket

Tusen tack för din medverkan i projektet och i denna enkät!

/Caroline & Sara
Appendix 5

Intervju

Börja med VARK©-test

1. Tycker du att man kan lära sig något av att se på film i undervisningen?

2. Vad för typ av film kan man lära sig av? Vad kan man lära sig av de olika?

3. Om ja, vad tycker du att man kan lära sig?

4. Har du tittat på film någon gång tidigare i engelskundervisningen?

5. Om ja:

Var det positivt eller negativt? Hur har ni jobbat med det? Vad? Vad tyckte du att du lärde dig?

6. Hur tycker du man ska använda film i undervisningen? (du kan ringa in flera svar)

Undertexter: svenska       engelska    inga undertexter

Tillsammans med: läsning   skrivande  diskussioner  inget

Om annat vad: ________________________________________________________________

Utveckla mer om vad man kan använda den till!

Hur tycker du att man lär sig bäst av film?
Titta tillbaka - Om du fick planera en perfekt lektion/lektioner.

7. Varför vill du titta på film i undervisningen?

8. (Tycker du att det man gör i skolan ska handla om saker utanför skolan?)


   Vad tyckte du?


11. Vad tyckte du om att använda flera olika typer av texter (film och bok)? Varför?

12. I vilka sammanhang upplever ni att film är bra att använda?

13. I vilka sammanhang upplever ni att skriven text är bra att använda?

14. Vad kan man använda mer? Hur och vad kan man lära sig?

15. Vad är fördelarna med att använda film?

16. Vad är nackdelarna med att använda film?

17. Hur var det att själv få komma med förslag till lektionsplaneringen? Påverkade detta?

18. Fick du igenom något/några förslag? Hur kändes det?

19. Har du gjort ditt bästa under detta projekt?

20. Vad hade du velat göra annorlunda? (med dig själv)
21. Vad tycker du att du har lärt dig?

22. Tycker du att du att ditt språk, förståelse har utvecklats? Med hjälp av vad?


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Genom experiment/att pröva själv    Genom att lyssna    Genom att se

Om annat, vad?

24. Varför lär du dig bäst så?

25. Har du några strategier när du läser läxor osv?

Kommentera vad de fick på VARK©-testet och om de tänkt på detta förr?

26. Tänkte du på hur du lär dig bäst när du valde vad du ville arbeta med under projektet?

27. Brukar du göra det?