

Integrating competence and *Bildung* through dystopian literature: Teaching Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* and democracy and citizenship in the English subject

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ABSTRACT

Artikeln behandlar användningen av dystopisk litteratur för ungdomar i engelskämnet i Norge och kopplar detta till det tvärvetenskapliga temat demokrati och medborgarskap. Detta tema är centralt i den nyligen reviderade läroplanen i Norge och är en viktig del av skolans mandat – utbildning måste säkerställa att eleverna är redo att delta i ett demokratiskt samhälle med kunskap, färdigheter och kritiskt tänkande när de har avslutat gymnasiet. När man arbetar med litteratur på detta sätt är det möjligt att integrera kompetens och bildning i klassrummet: specifik kunskap och kompetensutveckling kopplas till en värdebaserad utbildning som syftar till att hjälpa studenter i deras individuella utveckling.

Nyckelord: dystopi, utbildning i Norge, engelskämnet, bildning, kompetens

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INTRODUCTION

Debates about the purpose of the humanities re-emerge at irregular intervals. In Norway, one recent example is the white paper addressing the situation of the humanities, which “discusses how the potential of the humanities may be unleashed in order to meet the major challenges of our time – in business, in cultural life, in schools and in other important areas of society” (Kunnskapsdepartementet [KD], 2017). Furthermore, it aims to “contribute to greater mutual curiosity, exploration and proximity between the humanities and other subject areas and areas of society” (KD, 2017). The white paper argues that the humanities continue to be important and emphasizes that new knowledge in these fields needs to be transferrable to other parts of society as well.

The same set of arguments is used when examining literature’s role in the English subject in Norway. With the introduction of the curriculum *Knowledge Promotion* in 2006, the term “text” became more frequently used than “literature” in the subject curriculum, and this has continued in the latest version of the curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet [Udir], 2019a). The status of literature in the subject is that of one of several types of texts that the students are to read, understand, reflect on, and discuss. Furthermore, the curriculum emphasizes that texts are to assist in students’ development of overall competence in the subject: “By reflecting on, interpreting, and critically assessing different types of English-language texts, students are to develop language skills and knowledge about cultures and societies” (Udir, 2019a, p. 2, my translation). This means that literature in the English subject has to be taught in a manner that combines studies of texts with other elements of the subject, such as language learning and social studies. This is similar to the official view of the humanities in Norway as stated in the white paper mentioned above (KD, 2017). The humanities, such as literature, need to contribute towards the development of skills and knowledge in other areas as well.

In this article, I argue that the literary genre contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults makes possible several affordances for teaching and learning when working towards the larger aims of the English subject and of Norwegian education in general. More specifically, the genre lends itself well to teaching the new interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship, which is meant to tie together competence in different subjects, raise students’ awareness about important challenges in society, and help students develop into well-adjusted citizens (KD, 2019). Research suggests that English teachers in Norway are well aware of the close link between literature, culture, and society (Lyngstad, 2019, pp. 205-212), and when given the opportunity to read contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults, they clearly see this genre’s potential for teaching culture and society in the upper secondary classroom (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 240). However, this study also showed that some teachers had little experience teaching beyond textbooks and did not know where to start when choosing texts on their own and using them to reach the aims of the curriculum (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 195). Therefore, this article aims to provide reasoning and classroom suggestions for upper secondary English teachers who wish to use literature to address aims of the recently revised curriculum that relate to democracy and citizenship.

In what follows, I elaborate on the Norwegian educational context, including the notions of *Bildung* and competence, as well as the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship. Next, I examine critical writing on dystopian fiction to outline the genre’s potential for classroom use. Lastly, I explore how Malorie Blackman’s dystopian young adult novel *Noughts & Crosses* (2001/2017) can

be taught in the upper secondary classroom in a manner that addresses democracy and citizenship by including aspects of both *Bildung* and competence.

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

In Norway, the curricula have recently been revised, and the changes are being implemented from the autumn of 2020 onwards. The documents governing education consist of two parts: the core curriculum (KD, 2019), which underpins everything that happens in primary and secondary school, and the subject curricula, including English (Udir, 2019a), which detail aims and assessment in the various subjects. Even though the core curriculum and the subject curricula govern different aspects of education, the Ministry of Education emphasizes that they should be used together in order to ensure that the broader aims of education are realized (KD, 2019, p. 3). Interestingly, these two types of curricula represent two educational traditions that are at play simultaneously in Norwegian education: the *Bildung* tradition is represented in both the previous (Telhaug, 2011) and the current core curriculum, while the subject curricula build on competence-based education (KD, 2016).

Bildung

The educational aim *Bildung* corresponds to the Norwegian term “dannelse”, which when translated directly into English means “education”, “edification”, or “liberal education” (Biesta, 2006, pp. 11-12). In meaning, however, the term corresponds more closely to the German term *Bildung*, which is why there is consensus for employing it instead of the English translations (see e.g. Biesta, 2006; Standish, 2003). *Bildung* has traditionally been very important in Norwegian education. The main objective is a broad, liberal arts education which focuses on raising students to become citizens in a democratic society; this is done by working with “ideas about equality, individual autonomy and a communicative democracy” (Helskog, 2003, p. 19, my translation) in school. Additionally, self-education or “self-transformation” (Løvlie & Standish, 2003, p. 5) is an important part of *Bildung*: *Bildung* cannot be learnt superficially, but rather has to be engaged with on a deep level. Furthermore, *Bildung* can also be viewed as focusing on that which is “equally valid for everyone everywhere”, and through centering education on that which is general, such as knowledge and values that should be shared by all members of a society, it can serve as “a uniting force or a common ground” (Biesta, 2003, pp. 64, 63).

In Norwegian education, *Bildung* was inherent to the system prior to the 1990s, but only became explicitly present in formal documents with the reform in 1993 (Telhaug, 2011, p. 211). This reform introduced the core curriculum (Det kongelige kirke- utdannings- og forskningsdepartement [KUF], 1993), which remained unchanged until 2020, when the revised version took effect. The revised version addresses the purpose of education, core values, principles for education and all-round development, and principles for the schools’ practice (KD, 2019). It states that “the pupils [...] shall develop knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can master their lives and can take part in working life and society” (KD, 2019, p. 5). This means that the core curriculum combines discussing the instrumental role of schools in turning students into productive members of the work force with a focus on schools’ role in developing students into autonomous individuals. Most of the space is devoted to discussing how education should aid students in becoming well-adjusted human beings and citizens, for instance by focusing on the values “human dignity”, “identity and cultural diversity”, “critical thinking and ethical awareness”, “the joy of creating, engagement and the urge

to explore”, “respect for nature and environmental awareness”, and “democracy and participation” (KD, 2019). These values represent an education that aims to aid the students in their self-development – perfectly in line with the Norwegian *Bildung* tradition.

Competences

The national curriculum that was implemented from 2006 onwards, and which has been revised and updated recently, *Knowledge Promotion*, has kept the core curriculum in place, but changed the subject curricula radically. In *Knowledge Promotion*, the subject curricula are competence-focused, which in the Norwegian context is defined as such:

Competence means to be able to acquire and use knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations. Competence includes understanding, the ability to reflect, and critical thinking (Udir, 2020a, my translation).

This means that the current curriculum does not focus on knowledge as an aim in itself; the aim is rather that the students should be able to use their knowledge to solve tasks and master challenges. Furthermore, great emphasis is placed on assessment; the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training provides detailed guidelines for teachers that explain how they can assess students’ work with the curriculum (Udir, 2020b). This focus on assessment can be seen to work against the broader aims of *Bildung*, as the overarching aims and values of education can be difficult to measure. There is, therefore, an inherent tension present in current educational policies and practices: how can teachers work towards the larger values and aims of *Bildung* in the core curriculum, while simultaneously developing students’ knowledge and skills in ways that allow their competence to be assessed? This tension is present not just in Norwegian education, but in most Western countries following the steadily increasing influence of the OECD’s educational tests and policy work (Sjøberg, 2016). For example, Gert Biesta (2010) poses the question of whether schools are “indeed measuring what we value, or whether we are just measuring what we can easily measure and thus end up valuing what we (can) measure” (p. 13). This is a question which is highly relevant for the Norwegian *Knowledge Promotion* curriculum in general, and for the teaching of literature in particular. For this reason, this article has a twofold ambition: to suggest how literature education in the English subject can combine *Bildung* and competence, and exemplify how this can be done.

Democracy and citizenship

Compared to the previous core curriculum (KUF, 1993), one of the most important changes in the revised version is the introduction of three interdisciplinary topics: health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainability (KD, 2019). An explicit ambition is that two of these are included in the English subject curriculum, namely health and life skills and democracy and citizenship (Udir, 2019a, p. 3). These interdisciplinary topics, as stipulated by the core curriculum, should “help the pupils to achieve understanding and to see connections across subjects” (KD, 2019, p. 15). They are therefore linked both to overarching concepts and values in the core curriculum and to specific knowledge and skills in the subjects. More specifically, the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship aims to:

give the pupils knowledge and skills to face challenges in accordance with democratic principles. They shall understand dilemmas that arise when recognising both the preponderance of the majority and the rights of the minority. They shall train their ability to think critically, learn to deal with conflicts of opinion and respect disagreement. Through their work with the topic the pupils shall learn why democracy cannot be taken for granted and understand that it must be developed and maintained (KD, 2019, p. 16).

Additionally, the revised English subject curriculum includes a section that attempts to make it clear how democracy and citizenship can be incorporated into the subject. It includes points such as “developing students’ understanding of the world” by “encountering different societies and cultures”, and “preventing prejudices from forming” (Udir, 2019a, p. 3, my translation). This section requires some decoding for its purpose and its possibilities to become clear. For instance, the curriculum does not say anything about how students should learn about the world, or which societies and cultures they should encounter. This means that it is largely up to the teachers to decide how to approach the topic. Furthermore, this paragraph emphasizes students’ own communication with others across the world, and if this is to be interpreted as direct two-way communication, it could be challenging in an educational context. However, if we believe that a student reading literature written by someone in a different culture is also communication (see e.g. Sell, 2007), then we open this interdisciplinary topic towards literature as well, for instance the genre dystopian literature.

Arguably, curricula documents like the Norwegian core curriculum and English subject curriculum are utopian by nature. They provide lofty goals that teachers need to analyse, specify, and put into action in the classroom. Because these aims and values are very ambitious, they could be perceived as impossible to achieve completely – much like the utopia. As utopias and dystopias are closely linked, this forms the basis of one of the arguments why dystopian literature could be used to meet the aims of Norwegian curricula. In the next section, I elaborate further on the literary genre and discuss more arguments why dystopian literature is particularly suitable for working with the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship.

DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

In order to understand the literary genre dystopia, the genre utopia must first be addressed. The term utopia was coined by Thomas More, and his book with the same name (1516/2016) describes a fictional, ideal society which is very different from those at the time of publication. Utopia derives from Greek and means “no place”, but in contemporary, and especially popular, use, it is often conflated with eutopia, which means “good place” – hence, utopia means a good place that does not exist. A dystopia is the opposite of a utopia and means a “not good place” that does not exist. Both utopias and dystopias, then, are invented societies – one good, the other bad. However, the line between literary utopias and dystopias is frequently blurred (Basu, Broad, & Hintz, 2013; Gottlieb, 2001). In many dystopian novels, the purpose has been to create a utopian society, but due to what it takes to develop and maintain such a society, it often becomes a dystopia instead. This means that utopia and dystopia are not simple and clear opposites, but rather linked concepts that point at different sides of societies, including different perspectives within those societies.

In the literary genre dystopia, “society” is a central concept. According to Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry (2003), dystopian literature must include “an awareness of social organization” (p. 4) in order to belong to the genre. This can mean detailing governmental structures of oppression, such as in

George Orwell's *1984* (1949/2008) and Margaret Atwood's *The handmaid's tale* (1985), but it can also mean showing what happens when social organization as we know it collapses, like in Cormac McCarthy's *The road* (2006). Society is also emphasized by Gregory Claeys and Lyman T. Sargent (1999), who argue that dystopian – and utopian – literature is “the imaginative projection of a society that is substantially different from the one in which the author lives” (p. 1). M. H. Abrams (2005) emphasizes the link between our own societies and those found in the dystopias, as these works portray the “disastrous future culmination” of “ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order” (p. 337).

The remainder of this article focuses on a sub-genre of dystopian literature, namely contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. The current wave of this genre began with the publication of Suzanne Collins's *The hunger games* series (2008, 2009, 2010), which became an immediate, commercial success. Numerous dystopian novels, book series, TV series, and films have followed in the wake of Collins's books, both in English and in Norwegian (as well as several other languages). It is important to note that some central works in the genre were published before *The hunger games*, such as Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* (2001/2017), M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* (2002), and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005). This means that the genre did not suddenly spring into existence with Collins's books, but that it was the popularity of her books and the many that followed which led to the identification of the growing trend.

Here, literature written after the year 2000 is what is meant when discussing contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults. What many of these books have in common is that they use as their starting point an aspect of contemporary society, be it racial discrimination in *Noughts & Crosses* (2001/2017), technological advances in *Feed* (2002), climate change in *Exodus* (2002), or unrealistic beauty standards in *Uglies* (2005). Furthermore, dystopian novels detail how these societies are structured, which makes up important parts of the narrative. Sometimes the perspectives found in the narratives are those of the privileged in these societies, but more often than not, we follow the less fortunate in their struggles for a better life. The protagonists are always teenagers or young adults, which is part of the reason why these books are labelled as “young adult” and marketed mainly towards this age group, which is usually considered to be 12–18-year-olds (Hill, 2014, p. 3).

Research on contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults

In critical writing on contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults, three main features are often emphasized. Firstly, the genre addresses “pressing global concerns” (Basu et al., 2013, p. 1), which includes “liberty and self-determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self” (Basu et al., 2013, p. 1), as well as conformity and the dangers it can pose for individuals (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 7). This means that many young adult dystopias engage with and are critical towards important issues and trends in contemporary society, which makes them highly relevant for commenting on and understanding society. Secondly, many young adult dystopias are clearer in their message than their adult counterparts. Basu et al. (2013) argue that,

one of the strongest sources of appeal for young adult dystopias [...] is the unequivocal clarity of their message [...] this blatant didacticism signals to readers the problem with society while offering something like a training manual on how to overcome the dilemma, reverse the damage, and start anew (p. 5).

This means that the messages and morals are often more clearly conveyed, and the young characters are active participants in attempting to change their flawed societies. Quite often, but not always, they succeed (at least partially), which makes young adult dystopias more hopeful than dystopias for adults (Basu et al., 2013, pp. 2-3). Thirdly, dystopias tend to be narrated or focalized through young characters who “attempt to recreate the worlds in which they live, making their societies more egalitarian, more progressive, and, ultimately, more free” (Day, Green-Barteet, & Montz, 2014, p. 3); a result of them experiencing being powerless in one respect or another in their societies. These narratives often focus on marginalised groups in society and those who are oppressed or discriminated against because of their gender, race, sexuality, or class. Therefore, Hintz and Ostry (2003) argue that young readers can “see inequality in their own communities and countries” (p. 8) when being exposed to these types of texts.

Scholarly approaches to dystopian literature in the classroom have mainly focused on the genre’s potential for linking work with literature with aspects of social studies. All three traits of contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults that were mentioned above are relevant when exploring such issues. One example is the book *Teaching towards democracy with postmodern and popular culture texts* (Paugh, Kress, & Lake, 2014), which focuses on critical literacy. The editors argue in the very first sentence of the introduction that the book is “designed to encourage teachers and their students to identify voices relegated to the margins of society, and through literacy, to creatively negotiate visibility and power for those voices within the social discourse” (2014, p. 1). Two of the chapters in the book point at the potential that contemporary dystopian literature for young adults has to encourage social action (Marshall, 2014; Simmons, 2014). In other scholarly works, dystopian literature is presented as particularly apt for “promoting political awareness and fostering trans- and intercultural competences” (Matz, 2015, p. 264), for exploring consumerism in contemporary society (Wilkinson, 2010), and for helping students understand and take action in the world around them (Hill, 2012). In the Norwegian context, one doctoral dissertation addresses the classroom potential of the genre in an empirical study of upper secondary English teachers (Lyngstad, 2019), and a few studies have focused on understanding and interpreting dystopian texts, as well as discussing dystopian literature’s role in youth culture in non-academic journals and newspapers (Aalstad, 2014; Mørk, 2011; Nilsen, 2015).

This article builds on two of the studies above that suggest specific ways of working with contemporary dystopian literature for young adults in the classroom (Marshall, 2014; Simmons, 2014). The article links these studies’ focus on social action to the understanding of democracy and citizenship that is required in Norwegian education. This is done through the use of the novel *Noughts & Crosses* (Blackman, 2001/2017), which has not been addressed in this manner before. Furthermore, the remaining part of this article combines the discussion of the classroom potential of contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults with the educational notions of *Bildung* and competence that are essential components of Norwegian curricula.

USING CONTEMPORARY DYSTOPIAN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE TO TEACH DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

In this section, I examine why and how contemporary young adult dystopias could be used to teach the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship. In what follows, I link four features of the genre to the Norwegian educational context and show how teachers can work with one specific young adult dystopia, Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses*, in the English subject to address these features in a manner that combines *Bildung* and competence.

Firstly, as discussed earlier, one of the most important traits of dystopian literature is its focus on how societies are organized. Working with these fictional societies, in which oppression and lack of democracy are prevalent, could help students “learn why democracy cannot be taken for granted and understand that it must be developed and maintained” (KD, 2019, p. 16), which is one of the aims of the core curriculum.

Secondly, dystopian narratives are often told from the perspective of marginalised groups or minorities. There may be oppressive mechanisms in use that the fictional societies' governments are not trying to change; rather, they encourage the continued marginalisation of certain groups because the marginalised groups help keep the governments wealthy and in power. Reading about and seeing the perspectives of these people could help students understand why “a democratic state also protects indigenous peoples and minorities” and help students “develop awareness of minority and majority perspectives” (KD, 2019, p. 10), which are central points in the core curriculum.

Thirdly, the genre's continued relevance in today's somewhat chaotic political situation speaks volumes for its potential for classroom use: the Trump Presidency in the US, in particular, has caused commentators, journalists, and academics to point at parallels between dystopian literature and the present. For example, in January 2017, after Donald Trump's inauguration as President of the United States, George Orwell's classic dystopia *1984* rose to the top of Amazon's list of best-selling books, leading the publishers to order reprints of the novel (de Freytas-Tamura, 2017). Concepts like “alternative facts”, from the Trump administration, and “doublethink”, from Orwell's novel, are quite similar, and this has been pointed out by, among others, the British newspaper *The Guardian*, which ran an article called “Welcome to dystopia – George Orwell experts on Donald Trump” (Seaton, Crook, & Taylor, 2017). This link between the contemporary political reality and dystopian fiction makes dystopias highly relevant for the classroom. Dystopias can be a useful lens through which students can explore their own society in order to try to make sense of it – just like commentators, journalists, and academics are also currently trying to do.

All three arguments discussed above are linked to dystopias using as their starting points “ominous tendencies” (Abrams, 2005, p. 337) in contemporary society, and then playing out the possible consequences of allowing these developments to continue. By examining what these tendencies entail, students could get the opportunity to view their own society critically and to identify possible flaws in it. Thus, dystopias can encourage students to consider, become aware of, and, perhaps, attempt to do something about these developments. Therefore, I argue that using dystopian literature in the upper secondary classroom could address both the core curriculum's concern with “critical thinking and ethical awareness” and its stipulation that schools should “stimulate the pupils

to become active citizens, and give them the competence to participate in developing democracy in Norway” (KD, 2019, pp. 8, 16).

The fourth and last argument is the popularity of dystopian fiction among teenagers. During the last decade or so, there has been a steady supply – and a steady demand – for dystopias, both on page and on screen. Crag Hill (2012) explains this popularity by claiming that “dystopian novels champion free will, teenaged protagonists creating change in their lives when adults have failed to make a difference” (p. 113). Today, many children and teenagers in several countries, especially in the West, engage very actively in the climate debate, by for instance staging school strikes and climate demonstrations every Friday. This is perhaps the best example in contemporary society of young people attempting to create change where adults have failed. Therefore, it is unsurprising that teenagers find narratives appealing, in which young characters, much like themselves, affect the societies in which they live for the better. The popularity and relevance of the genre could in turn mean that students engage with the texts when encountering them in school, and in order to work profoundly with a topic like democracy and citizenship, student engagement is crucial.

The arguments presented in this section can all be linked to *Bildung*: the first three, by focusing on the organization of fictional societies, marginalised groups, and links to contemporary political situations, address the importance of “equality, individual autonomy and a communicative democracy” (Helskog, 2003, p. 19, my translation), which are important tenets of *Bildung* in the Norwegian context. The fourth argument, which focuses on the popularity of the genre and students’ potential engagement with it, highlights the potential for deep interaction with texts in the classroom which can lay the foundation for what Løvlie and Standish (2003) argue is another important aspect of *Bildung*, namely “self-transformation” (p. 5). Contemporary young adult dystopian literature can also be used to promote specific competences in the English classroom – this will be discussed in more detail later in the article.

Malorie Blackman’s *Noughts & Crosses*

Malorie Blackman’s *Noughts & Crosses* (2001/2017) is set in a society that greatly resembles modern-day Britain, with one major difference: centuries earlier, white Europeans did not colonize other parts of the world and enslave the people living there.¹ Instead, black people called the Crosses colonized other countries and enslaved the white people called the Noughts. At the time in which the novel is set, Noughts are no longer slaves, but they are segregated from the Crosses. This segregation is reminiscent of the Jim Crow era in the USA, which was the system of institutionalized racist laws lasting from the end of the Civil War until the 1950s (Mæhlum, 2020). Noughts and Crosses have mostly separate schools, hospitals, and neighbourhoods, and most of the people in positions of power, such as politics, law enforcement, courts, media, academia, and business, are Crosses. A terrorist organization called the Liberation Militia, consisting of Noughts, uses violence to fight against the Crosses – much like the IRA did during the Troubles in Northern Ireland (Mustad, Tvedt, & Julsrud, 2019). The abuse of power on the side of the Crosses and the use of violence on the side of the Noughts mean that the political climate grows ever harsher as the events of the novel unfold, and those that seek to improve the society by working peacefully for racial equality are outnumbered and not taken seriously.

The protagonists in Blackman's novel are two teenagers: Sephy, a Cross girl, and Callum, a Nought boy. The two have been best friends since they were children, but they have had to keep their friendship secret for years. A love affair gradually develops between them, but a relationship between a Nought and a Cross cannot end well in their world: Callum ends up being executed after he is convicted of being involved with the Liberation Militia and kidnapping Sephy. This means that *Noughts & Crosses* ends on a bleak note: society has not changed substantially as a result of Callum and Sephy's actions. However, as this is only the first book of a longer series, the end of the first book does not equal the end of the narrative, and there are hints at the end of the book which suggest that Sephy and Callum's tragic story had some impact on their society.

My point of departure when explaining how and why *Noughts & Crosses* is suitable for working with the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship in upper secondary school is that the novel's fictional universe is very similar to societies and situations that are part of our Western world's past and present. And yet, because the roles of the races are reversed, the novel is still very different from historical and contemporary events. The novel displays the systematic racism at work on all levels of both ours and the fictional society – from how most positions of power are occupied by Crosses to how plasters labelled as “skin-coloured” only exist in the colour of the dominant race (Blackman, 2001/2017, pp. 67-68). Furthermore, it shows how marginalisation can lead oppressed people to violence: Callum loses both his sister and his father during the course of the narrative, and when he is kicked out of school for merely being related to his terrorist father, he turns to terrorism himself. The novel does not make excuses for violence, but rather examines what lack of equality and real democracy can lead to: when people have nowhere to turn for help and no hopes of a better future, they become desperate. Importantly, the novel focuses on the structures in society that encourage racism and marginalisation, and, because of that, also lead to terrorism.

When working with *Noughts & Crosses* in the classroom, one advantage is that the story exists in several different formats, which makes it adaptable to different types of students. Malorie Blackman's novel is over 400 pages long, which might be too overwhelming for some upper secondary school students (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 175). However, the book has been adapted into a graphic novel (Edginton, Aggs, & Blackman, 2015) and a graded reader (Blackman & Holmes, 2011), which could make the story accessible to a broader range of English learners. Furthermore, it has been adapted into a play, and it is possible to acquire the script if one wishes to use drama to work with the story (Blackman & Cooke, 2008). Lastly, a television series based on *Noughts & Crosses* recently aired on BBC (Holmes & Adom, 2020). Although this series takes longer steps away from Blackman's original novel than the other adaptations mentioned above, it is an interesting audio-visual take on the story that could also be used in the classroom. These adaptations not only add to the educational value of the text, as they make it possible to adapt and use it in different manners and with different types of students, but they also attest to the resilience and quality of Blackman's original work. Unfortunately, racism and terrorism, which are the two main topics addressed, are still part of contemporary society. That is probably why *Noughts & Crosses*, which was first published almost twenty years ago, is being reinterpreted and retold in various formats, and this means that it is also still relevant in schools.

Teaching *Noughts & Crosses*: suggestions for the classroom

When teaching democracy and citizenship through *Noughts & Crosses*, it is important to help students see links to the world in which we live. That way, teaching can promote both *Bildung* and competence as expressed in the Norwegian core and subject curricula. In this section, I provide three suggested tasks that outline how this could be done in upper secondary schools.

An introductory task when working with *Noughts & Crosses* could be to look closely at one of the history lessons in the novel (Blackman, 2001/2017, pp. 127-132). Here, the teacher, who is a Cross, asks the class to name inventors, scientists, and explorers. Then, the teacher asks the class to explain what these pioneers have in common, and no one is able to give the correct answer other than Callum, who points out that they were all Crosses. The teacher then responds: “Throughout history [...] we have been the dominant race on Earth. We have been the explorers, the ones to move entire backward civilizations onwards” (Blackman, 2001/2017, pp. 127-131). Callum then counters that there are Noughts who have made significant contributions – and mentions Robert E. Peary – who in our world is a famous European-American explorer who claimed to have been first to reach the North Pole. Peary is completely unknown to the Cross teacher, though, and Callum is accused of spreading lies about Nought scientists and inventors who, according to the teacher, do not exist. After reading closely these pages from the novel, the students could discuss whether they have heard of these Nought and Cross pioneers mentioned here before – and look them up if they have not. An interesting addition here is Blackman’s Author’s note at the end of the novel where she explains that this scene parallels her own experience in school: she writes that all the pioneers mentioned in this history lesson are real, but that she only learned about Robert E. Peary, who is white, when she went to school (Blackman, 2001/2017, p. 438). This could lead to an interesting discussion concerning who writes history and who receives recognition for achievements, and whether it is possible, if you never hear about or see great achievements by someone who is like you, to believe that you can achieve something great as well. In this way, *Noughts & Crosses* can become a text that promotes critical literacy, since it makes “students move their examinations beyond the personal and to challenge ideas that they may have previously accepted as the status quo” (Marshall, 2014, p. 137). Such a discussion would also address aspects of identity and cultural diversity in addition to democracy and citizenship from the core curriculum (KD, 2019, pp. 7-8 and 16), and it has the potential to help students develop an “understanding of the world as being dependent on culture” and “prevent prejudices from forming”, which is stated in the English subject curriculum (Udir, 2019a, p. 3, my translation).

Building on the history lesson task, the students could work together in pairs or groups and create lists of all the ways in which Callum in particular and the Noughts in general are mistreated or discriminated against in the novel. Then, they can try to locate similar cases of discrimination in our world – both past and present. Some aspects that could be included are slavery, segregation (especially in schools), Crosses dominating government positions, Noughts continually being vilified in popular culture, mixed-race couples being beaten up, and Noughts struggling to find employment other than menial, low-paid labour. Both this task and the history lesson task require that the teacher highlights the ways in which the book invites comparison between the fictional society and contemporary society as well as the society at the time in which the book was written. Tasks such as these will help raise awareness and “encourage students to assess their world”, which in turn might make them “take action against the social problems they observe” (Simmons, 2014, p.

80). Furthermore, activities like these two could be relevant for both the core curriculum and the subject curriculum in English: the former due to the stated importance of education focusing on how “a democratic society is based on the idea that all citizens have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes” (KD, 2019, p. 10), and the latter due to competence aims such as students being able to “explore and reflect on diversity and social issues in the English-speaking world based on historical contexts” after completing their compulsory English course in upper secondary school (Udir, 2019a, pp. 7 and 9). By linking what happens in the novel to what has actually happened in our world, students should be able to reflect on diversity and social issues, like the competence aim states. Students should also be able to see the importance of equality as a cornerstone of democracy, which is a value promoted in the core curriculum.

The third task asks students to describe what the society in *Noughts & Crosses* would be like if it were a real democracy where the rights of Noughts were protected. In particular, how would Callum and his family’s lives be different? This task could be used as a continuation of the previous task that required students to list the ways in which Noughts are being discriminated against – particularly if the previous task is conducted while the students are reading the book, and this task is conducted after the students have finished the book. In order to make sure that the students are able to answer this task, the teacher should provide them with resources that explain the features of a democracy, as this would give the students sensible starting points for creating a democratic society within the *Noughts & Crosses* universe. This task would entail students having to say something about issues highlighted in the core curriculum, including “the relationship between democracy and key human rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to vote and freedom of association” (KD, 2019, p. 16), as these are among the things missing in *Noughts & Crosses*. Such a task would also allow students to develop competence, as they would “use knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in [...] unfamiliar contexts and situations” (Udir, 2020a, my translation) – since the society they will be describing does not exist, this can be defined as an “unfamiliar context”. The task will require that they understand what a democracy is, reflect on why the society in *Noughts & Crosses* is not a democracy, and think critically about what would have to be changed in order for that society to become a democracy – all parts of what competence is defined as in the Norwegian context (Udir, 2020a).

In order to ensure that students possess sufficient cultural and historical knowledge to solve the tasks above, it could be beneficial to enter into an interdisciplinary project with another subject, such as Social Studies. The Social Studies curriculum for upper secondary school includes several competence aims that are central when working with *Noughts & Crosses*: it states specifically that students should look into the issue of racism, be able to “reflect on what it means to be a citizen”, and “assess how power affects individuals and societies” (Udir, 2019b, my translation). By learning about relevant historical events and contexts such as the Jim Crow era in the USA and the Troubles in Northern Ireland and linking these to present-day society, students could meet objectives of both English and Social Studies and develop in-depth knowledge of the issues in question. Such collaboration between subjects is encouraged in the revised curriculum, particularly through work with the interdisciplinary topics – in this case, the topic democracy and citizenship (KD, 2019).

In addition to my suggested tasks, there are, of course, numerous other ways of working with *Noughts & Crosses* in the classroom. Regardless of the teacher’s choice of approach, though, it is crucial that tasks are open-ended when working with the aims of the core curriculum that seek to

develop students' values. When engaging with open-ended tasks, students are required to think more deeply, which in turn can affect them in the manner necessary if values are to be developed and/or changed. Furthermore, Marshall (2014) encourages use of contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults in a full class and not just as independent reading because "teacher-led integration, replete with in-depth and nuanced study – can open up these texts for deeper analysis than the typical secondary student might manage on her/his own" (p. 141). The in-depth understanding and analysis that are necessary for critical literacy as suggested by Marshall (2014) are also closely linked to developing competence as defined by the Norwegian curriculum, which is related to "understanding, the ability to reflect, and critical thinking" (Udir, 2020a, my translation).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that using contemporary young adult dystopian literature in the English subject classroom can be viewed as an attempt to integrate competence and *Bildung*. This means linking specific knowledge and development of skills as expressed in the subject curriculum's competence aims with the value-based education outlined in the core curriculum, which aims at aiding students' formation as individuals and citizens. Since dystopian literature encourages students to critically examine their own society while reading about a fictional world, it is a genre that is well-suited for addressing the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship in upper secondary school, exemplified here through Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* (2001/2017). This topic is central in Norwegian education because of the overarching goal of schools to educate knowledgeable, skilled citizens who can be active participants in a democratic society – this article thus provides suggestions for how literature can aid in that important process.

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¹ The *Noughts & Crosses* series consists of a total of five books (the fifth was only published in 2019). In this article, I only discuss the first novel in the series.

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