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Anette Svensson

Have multimodal texts entered the Swedish classroom? Teaching literature in upper secondary school

Abstract

Anette Svensson, PhD
The Department of Language Studies
Umeå University
90187 Umeå
Sweden
anette.svensson@sprak.umu.se

Have Multimodal Texts Entered the Swedish Classroom? Teaching Literature in Upper Secondary School

Anette Svensson, PhD, Umeå University, Sweden

Abstract

In a time when multimodal fictional texts such as TV-series and computer games are a large part of how Swedish youths, particularly those who study at upper secondary level, use, consume and produce fictional texts, it is relevant to take a closer look at if and how multimodal fictional texts have become part of the Swedish educational processes.

The young generation, consisting of “digital natives” (Prensky 2001), has a new approach to cultural productions. There is a wish to be a prosumer, the combination of producer and consumer, that is, not only read, watch or listen to various texts, but simultaneously be an active co-creator and contribute to the content (Tapscott 1996; Buckingham & Willett 2006; Jenkins 2006). To import and transform strategies from numerous media forms when producing texts is already a part of the everyday activities for Swedish youths (Elmfeldt & Erixon 2007), and it is probable that similar transformation processes are used when consuming and producing fictional texts that have been concretized in various media forms. Compilation analyses are a part of many youths’ spare time activities that include fictional texts, but the school system has an important function in the development of the so-called narrative competences (Lundström & Olin-Scheller 2010), that is, what it takes to be a user of fictional texts and a participant in fictional text-universes. Is there a big difference between the fictional texts Swedish youths use in their spare time and the texts they use as part of their schoolwork?

Shifting focus away from the fictional texts Swedish youths use in their spare time to the texts they use as part of their schoolwork, this study aims to explore if and how fictional multimodal texts are used in the teaching of native (Swedish) and foreign (English) languages in Swedish upper secondary schools. The study more specifically aims to answer the following research questions: 1) What texts do the teachers interviewed in upper secondary school use when teaching literature in Swedish and English? 2) If, and how do they work with multimodal texts? 3) What knowledge do they expect their students to gain from the various texts they use in the educational process? 4) Is there a difference in the competence that is to be gained from using multimodal texts as opposed to non-multimodal texts?

The study is based on qualitative research interviews conducted with five teachers on upper secondary level in northern Sweden. The interviews were semi-structured and took place during the spring of 2012. The methodological approach to this study, to collect data using qualitative research interviews, is considered a fruitful method because the focus of the study is on the informants’ experiences of their own teaching processes.
Based on the interviews that are conducted, but not yet analysed, the study is expected to show that teachers in upper secondary school use predominantly printed fictional texts (novels, short stories and poetry) and movies when teaching English and Swedish literature. The primary reason for using movies as part of the education process appears to be to facilitate the students’ understanding of certain difficult parts of the courses such as the classics and Shakespeare. Hence, the students at upper secondary level are taught literature through the same text forms today as 20 years ago. The large variety of fictional texts – especially multimodal fictional texts – that exists in today’s society is not represented in the language education.

It is of course crucial that the students can gain the required literary knowledge of (and through) printed fictional texts, particularly if the students do not meet this kind of text to a high degree outside of the school context. However, by not using multimodal texts such as computer games as examples of fictional texts, the teachers are not benefitting from neither the informal knowledge nor the analysis methods their students have acquired in an informal context during their spare time.

References