Inland Norway University

Faculty of Education

Elena Rozalia Petre

Master's Thesis

Young Adult Dystopian Literature in the English Subject in Norwegian Secondary Schools

Interdisciplinary topics in *Uglies* (2005) and *Flawed* (2016)

Master of Didactics of Culture and Language

2MIKSAVH3

Spring 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to give my thanks to a number of people who have contributed in different ways to the completion of this study.

First, I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to my supervisors, Rebecca Sioned Davies and Marit Elise Lyngstad, for their guidance, thorough feedback, and constructive criticism.

I would also like to thank my friend and colleague, Julia, who first introduced me to young adult dystopian literature.

To my family and friends, who most probably felt abandoned this year, thank you for your patience and words of encouragement. I promise to make it up to you!

Last but not least, I want to thank my husband and best friend, Gabi, who sacrificed a lot during the last couple of years so that I could finish my studies. Thank you for your love and support, for putting up with me, and listening to my frustrations.

Table of Contents

Norsk sammendrag 5

Abstract 6

1. Introduction 7

1.1 Thesis aim and research question 8

1.2 Justification of the chosen novels 8

1.3 Theoretical background 10

1.3.1 Didactic benefits of literature 10

1.3.2 Young adult dystopian literature 11

1.3.3 The revised curricula 12

1.4 Methodology 13

1.5 Structure 14

2. Literature review 16

2.1 Didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature 16

2.2 YA dystopian literature in the classroom – the Norwegian context 20

2.3 Didactic benefits of *Uglies* and *Flawed* 22

2.4 Concluding remarks 24

3. The curricula documents 25

3.1 Core values 25

3.2 The interdisciplinary topics in the core curriculum 28

3.3 The English subject curriculum 30

3.3.1 The interdisciplinary topics in the English subject curriculum 31

3.3.2 The relevance of YA dystopian literature for the English subject 32

3.4 Concluding remarks 33

4. Literary analysis 34

4.1 Identity, relationships, and growing up 35
4.1.1 Identity 36
4.1.2 Relationships 39
4.1.3 Growing up 47
4.2 Ethical issues, society, and governmental control 52
4.3 Environmental concerns 56
4.4 Concluding remarks 60
5. Discussion of the didactic benefits of *Uglies* and *Flawed* 62
5.1 Health and life skills 62
5.1.1 Physical and mental health 63
5.1.2 Identity 65
5.1.3 The joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore 66
5.2 Democracy and citizenship 67
5.2.1 Human dignity and cultural diversity 68
5.2.2 Critical thinking and ethical awareness 69
5.2.3 Democracy and participation 71
5.3 Sustainable development 74
5.4 Concluding remarks 76
6. Conclusions 77
6.1 Summary of findings 77
6.2 Further research 78
References 80

Norsk sammendrag

Formålet med denne masteroppgaven er å undersøke relevansen av dystopisk ungdomslitteratur i engelskfaget i Norge, i lys av de nylig introduserte tverrfaglige temaene: *folkehelse og livsmestring*, *demokrati og medborgerskap* og *bærekraftig utvikling*. Innholdet i hvert av disse temaene er beskrevet i overordnet del. I tillegg er også *folkehelse og livsmestring* og *demokrati og medborgerskap* inkludert i læreplanen i engelsk.

Studien bruker to kvalitative metoder for å besvare forskningsspørsmålet: Hvordan er dystopisk ungdomslitteratur nyttig for å innlemme tverrfaglige temaer i engelskundervisningen? Først presenterer jeg en oversikt over de generelle didaktiske fordelene med sjangeren, gjennom en litteraturgjennomgang. Deretter gjennomfører jeg en litterær analyse av Scott Westerfelds *Uglies* (2005) og Cecelia Aherns *Flawed* (2016). Gjennom nærlesing av romanene utforsker jeg de generiske sidene ved dystopisk ungdomslitteratur som gjør denne sjangeren spesielt egnet for å ta opp de tverrfaglige temaene.

Den litterære analysen av romanene tyder på at dystopisk litteratur er høyst relevant for de verdiene og prinsippene vi ønsker å lære elever i Norge. Ved å ta opp temaer som identitet, relasjoner, oppvekst, etiske og sosiale problemer, myndighetskontroll og miljøutfordringer, gir sjangeren en rekke muligheter for å reflektere over og diskutere viktige problemstillinger som er en del av de tre tverrfaglige temaene.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the relevance of YA dystopian literature in the English classes in Norwegian secondary schools, in light of the newly introduced interdisciplinary topics: *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*. The core curriculum includes all three of these topics, while the first two are also found in the English subject curriculum.

The study uses two qualitative research methods to answer the research question: How is young adult dystopian literature useful for integrating interdisciplinary topics into English subject teaching? First, through a literature review, I present an overview of the general didactic benefits of the genre. Next, I conduct a literary analysis of Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005) and Cecelia Ahern's *Flawed* (2016). Through a close-reading of the novels, I explore the generic aspects of YA dystopian literature that make it a particularly suitable genre for addressing the interdisciplinary topics.

The literary analysis of the novels suggests that dystopian literature is highly relevant for those values and principles that we aspire to teach students in Norway. By addressing themes such as identity, relationships, growing up, ethical and social problems, governmental control, and environmental concerns, the genre presents numerous opportunities for reflection on and discussion of important issues embedded in the three interdisciplinary topics.

1. Introduction

With the revision of the curricula documents for primary and secondary education and training in Norway, three interdisciplinary topics were introduced: *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development* (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15). A particularly suitable genre for teaching these interdisciplinary topics is YA (young adult) dystopian literature, as many of the values and themes embedded in the interdisciplinary topics (e.g., identity, critical thinking, ethical issues, environmental awareness) are found in YA dystopias. Discussing the potential of the genre, Gadowski (2014) argues that YA dystopian fiction has become a "powerful tool for young readers to tackle cogent cultural ideas" (p. 145).

Moreover, other scholars have explained that YA dystopian literature fits well with adolescent development. For instance, Scholes and Ostenson (2013) state that "the settings, themes and characters in dystopian fiction are an appropriate fit with the intellectual changes that occur during adolescence" (p. 3). On a similar note, Appleyard (1991), referring to YA literature in general, argues that: "these books fit the teenagers' way of making sense out of the world" (p. 100). Further, he explains that there are three key aspects that teenagers value in literature. First, they need to experience "involvement with the book and identification with the character", second, they appreciate "the realism of the story", and third, they consider that "a good story makes them think" (p. 100). Dystopias include all these elements, encouraging adolescents to think critically, and inviting them to reflect not only upon aspects related to personal development, by identifying with the protagonists, but upon social, political, and ethical issues as well, by comparing the worlds depicted in the novels with real life. Thus, although works of fiction, YA dystopias address highly relevant themes for the young generation.

The interplay between common young adult dystopian tropes and the values we want to promote in education, according to the curriculum, makes this genre a valuable resource for teachers and should inspire them to use YA dystopias in the classroom. However, despite the fact that teachers themselves acknowledge the educational potential of the genre (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 252), young adult dystopian literature is seldom used in the English classes in Norway (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 231). Moreover, investigating student-teachers' confidence in teaching *sustainable development* using YA dystopian literature, Guanio-Uluru's (2019) pilot study has shown that "Norwegian teacher education currently lacks methodological tools that enable student-teachers to develop the competence required in order to be able to encourage sustainable development in their pupils" (p. 6). Considering that the interdisciplinary topics

were introduced simultaneously in the curriculum, this study – although focused on *sustainable development* – could indicate that teachers need more training in teaching all three of the interdisciplinary topics.

My curiosity about the educational benefits of YA dystopias in the Norwegian context was sparked by this gap between theory and practice, as well as a perceived compatibility of the themes addressed in YA dystopian literature with the values embedded in the interdisciplinary topics. Thus, during my first year as a master's student, I wrote a project report on this topic in the English didactics course. Through a close-reading of Scott Westerfeld's YA dystopian novel *Uglies* (2005/2011), I investigated the didactic benefits of the genre when teaching the interdisciplinary topic *democracy and citizenship*. This thesis is a development of that project report, being focused on all three of the interdisciplinary topics and including one more novel for analysis and discussion – Cecelia Ahern's *Flawed* (2016). Furthermore, in the current study, the topic *democracy and citizenship* is discussed mainly in relation to Ahern's novel.

1.1 Thesis aim and research question

The purpose of this study is to analyse the previously mentioned young adult dystopian novels – *Uglies* (2005), by the American writer Scott Westerfeld and *Flawed* (2016), by the Irish novelist Cecelia Ahern – in light of the newly introduced interdisciplinary topics: *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*. Through a close-reading of the novels, I will show the relevance of this genre in the English classes in secondary school in Norway, to answer my research question: How is young adult dystopian literature useful for integrating interdisciplinary topics into English subject teaching? By examining the relationship between generic tropes of young adult dystopian literature and the values and principles which form the fundament of education in Norway, this thesis will exemplify how employing YA dystopias in the English subject can enable teachers to implement the interdisciplinary topics in the classroom, thus contributing to the field of English didactics.

1.2 Justification of the chosen novels

Both of the novels chosen for this project are the first book in a series. *Uglies* is the first volume in the *Uglies* series, which was originally planned as a trilogy, while *Flawed* is the first novel in a duology. Discussing the importance of novel series, Williams (2021) argues that, although teachers do not have time to use series in class, it is essential to encourage students to read such texts, because they "provide an important opportunity to read independently within a familiar

and already negotiated framework" (p. 159). Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, I considered that choosing novels from series was more beneficial than using standalone books. Moreover, considering the fact that *Uglies* and *Flawed* come from two different cultural contexts, employing novels from two series, instead of a whole series, can offer a broader perspective on the relevance of YA dystopias in the classroom.

Published eleven years apart, both novels are concerned with the same idea: perfection – either physical or moral. This main theme that the novels share is one of the reasons which make them suitable for classroom use in secondary school. Body image and the need for recognition from their peers, teachers and parents, are common concerns among adolescents, contributing to their development of self-esteem (Coleman, 2011, pp. 63-65). Westerfeld's work depicts a world where everybody looks the same, where society's beauty standards are being used as means of allegedly ensuring equality for each citizen: "So what if people look more alike now? It's the only way to make people equal" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 43). On their sixteenth birthday, all teenagers are being surgically transformed from "uglies" into "pretties". Ahern's novel addresses the concept of perfection from a moral point of view: any citizen who has made an ethical mistake is branded as "Flawed": "their flaws are publicly named and their skin is seared with the *F* brand in one of five places. The branding location depends on their error of judgement" (Ahern, 2016, p. 5). The protagonists in the two novels, Tally Youngblood in *Uglies* and Celestine North in *Flawed*, were both raised to believe that their societies are perfect, that the strict rules they must follow are in the best interest of all citizens. However, they slowly find out the truth about their worlds. Consequently, they start questioning the systems and their self-discovery journey begins.

Besides the theme of perfection, which I believe can resonate with secondary students, there are other reasons why I consider these novels appropriate for classroom use. Being written for young adults, the language used in the novels is accessible for students in secondary school. Also, the protagonists' age (Tally is just about to turn sixteen, while Celestine is seventeen years old) can make it easier for students to relate to the characters. Moreover, the protagonist in *Flawed*, Celestine North, is mixed-race. Children's and young adult literature have long been an "all-white world" (Larrick, 1965), and the question of diversity has often been raised among scholars (Dahlen, 2020; Lafferty, 2014; Thomas, 2016). Despite the fact that racial diversity is growing in novels written for young readers, the progress is still slow (Fernando, 2021). Therefore, it is highly important, especially in a multicultural society, to use books that promote diversity, to give students the opportunity to identify with characters matching their cultural

and racial background. Based on all these considerations, I believe both *Uglies* and *Flawed* can successfully be used in the English classes in secondary school, with students in year 10 and older, to teach the interdisciplinary topics.

1.3 Theoretical background

For the purpose of this thesis, I first need to bring into discussion the benefits of using literature, in general, in the classroom. Further, a brief history of young adult dystopian literature is needed to trace the recent development and increased popularity of the genre. Last, an introduction of the revised curricula documents is required, since the discussion of the didactic benefits of the two novels will be done in relation to the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum.

1.3.1 Didactic benefits of literature[1]

The benefits of using literature in EFL/ESL classes have been extensively studied. Various scholars have written about how literary texts can be used to increase students' motivation and help them improve their language skills. Carlsen (2018) argues that teachers can easily motivate their students and ensure variation in the classroom by using extensive reading. Offering students the possibility to choose the books they want to read themselves will not only lead to increased motivation but will indirectly have a positive impact on students' language skills, in general. On a similar note, Krashen (2013) argues that free reading can lead to improved reading and writing skills, as well as developed vocabulary, better spelling and control of grammatical structures. Also, Williams (2021) refers to contemporary teenage fiction as "an outstanding valuable resource for the EFL classroom", as YA novels can "enrich learning and enjoyment in learning" (p. 141).

Moreover, other scholars have gone beyond the didactic benefits of literary works directly related to language learning, and highlighted the effects of literature on students' introspection, their relation to the world and the environment, and their critical thinking. Brevik and Lyngstad (2020) argue that, through the texts they read, learners can better understand not only themselves, but also the others, while Carlsen (2018) suggests that they can "read the world in a critical way" (p. 121). Also, Daley (2019) explains that good children's and YA books can promote "a love of nature and an interest in sustainability" (p. 178). Furthermore, scholars have emphasised the way literature can help students "grow, develop, ask questions, think new

[1] This overview is a revised version of the one used in the project report mentioned on p. 8.

thoughts, and even feel new emotions" (Alsup, 2010, p. 5) and develop their intercultural competence, once they understand the concept of "otherness" (Lütge, 2013) and learn to change their perspective (Bland, 2020).

1.3.2 Young adult dystopian literature

One of the literary genres that are especially suitable for addressing concepts such as critical thinking, changing perspective, and open-mindedness is dystopia. Defining this term would be impossible without mentioning the word *utopia* first, from which *dystopia* derives. The concept of *utopia* goes all the way back to ancient Greece, as it can be found in Plato's *Republic*, but the word was coined by Thomas More in 1516, in his political satire with the same name. The neologism More created at that time is a compound form, coming from the Greek words "u" (no) and "topos" (place). The term *eutopia* (also created by More) is another compound form of Greek origin and its meaning is: *the good place*. The fact that these words (i.e., *utopia* and *eutopia*) are so similar and homophones has led to a merging of the terms, *utopia* being now used when referring to both a *no place* and a *good place*, an ideal (Vieira, 2010, pp. 3-5).

The term *dystopia* was first used by John Stuart Mill in 1868, in a parliamentary speech and is another derivation from *utopia* (Vieira, 2010, p. 16). As a literary genre, dystopia developed in the late 1800s, though dystopian aspects have always existed in utopian works (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 53). Understood as the opposite of *utopia*, *dystopia* introduces the readers to an imaginary world, often placed in the far future, where "the dream has become a nightmare" (Booker & Thomas, 2009, p. 65), where "technical and political authoritarianism had caused the near obliteration of humans" (Aughterson, 2016, p. 99). This genre depicts imaginary, often futuristic worlds, in which what in the beginning appears to be a perfect life for each and every citizen turns out to be a strictly controlled society, where authorities have the power to decide on every single aspect of one's existence, dispossessing the individuals of their free will, freedom of opinion and expression. Any attempt at revolt is seen as treason and fiercely punished. According to Sargent (2013), the historical and political situation in the 1900s – the two world wars and other armed conflicts, the struggle against colonialism, racism – had led to the twentieth century being called "the dystopian century" (p. 10). After the publication of Zaymatin's *We* (1921), Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's *1984* (1949), which are considered the three seminal works that established the dystopian genre (Booker, 2014, p. 86), this kind of literature has become more and more popular, various types of dystopias being published, including the ones written specifically for young adults.

The term *young adult* was coined by YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) in the 1960s and was, originally, referring to literature targeting readers between twelve and eighteen (Strickland, 2015, April 15, para. 6). However, there is no clear age limit for what we call young adult literature nowadays, as there has been an increased interest in this genre among readers who do not necessarily belong to this age group (Knutsen, 2017, cited in Lyngstad, 2019, p. 49). Starting with the 1960s – when YA literature had already started to gain ground among teenagers both in the United States (Alsup, 2010, p. 1) and Norway (Birkeland et. al., 2018, cited in Lyngstad, 2019, p. 70) – "there has been a turn towards dystopian writing" (Gadowski, 2014, p. 152). However, it was not until later, in the 1990s that young adult dystopias became so prominent in the literary world. Referring to this genre as a "trend" in contemporary literature, Booker (2014) argues that it "probably began with Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), gained momentum with Jeann DuPrau's *The City of Ember* (2003), and reached its zenith with Suzanne Colin's *The Hunger Games* (2008) and its sequels" (p. 88). After the publication of these works, various others have followed, young adult dystopian literature becoming a "widespread publishing phenomenon" (Basu et al., 2013, p. i).

1.3.3 The revised curricula

As the genre is specifically written for young, immature readers, YA dystopias have great educational potential. Referring to the impact of such novels on the readers, Hintz and Ostry (2003) argue that the genre "has been produced for a variety of reasons, and it has a range of effects, from play and escape to sustained political reflection" (p. 1). Similarly, Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) identify two roles of YA dystopian literature: didacticism and escape (p. 5). Indeed, through the topics addressed, this genre is relevant for Norwegian students, especially after the implementation of the new curriculum.

Education in secondary school in Norway is based on two curricula: the core curriculum and the national curriculum. The core curriculum is a general document, for all subjects in primary and secondary education and training, and presents the "values and principles" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019) which form the basis for education in Norway. The national curriculum includes a curriculum document for each subject. Both the core curriculum and the national curriculum have been revised in 2019/2020 and, from August 2020, they have gradually been implemented in schools. A major change in the new curricula is the introduction of three interdisciplinary topics: *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*. These topics are presented in detail in the core curriculum. In

addition, the English subject curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020) includes two of these interdisciplinary topics (*health and life skills* and *democracy and citizenship*), and a description of their relevance for the subject. A detailed discussion of these documents will be provided in chapter 3.

1.4 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach, employing two methods: literature review and literary analysis. It was important to start with a literature review of previous studies, to place the topic of my thesis in the larger context of using dystopias in the English classroom in general, but more specifically, to set the basis for my discussion of the relevance of this particular genre in the Norwegian context. In order to do this, I have first read and reviewed four studies (Ames, 2013; Marshall, 2014; Simmons, 2014; Wilkinson, 2010) which address the didactic benefits of YA dystopias, focusing on elements that can be connected to the values and principles embedded in the interdisciplinary topics. Then, I discussed two Norwegian studies (Guanio-Uluru, 2019; Lyngstad, 2019) relevant for identifying the research gap between theory and practice in Norway. Finally, I had a look at more specific studies on *Uglies* and *Flawed*, addressing themes from the novels compatible with the values and principles from the core curriculum. Most of these studies (Arigo, 2014; Donnelly, 2019; Fritz, 2014; McDonough & Wagner, 2014; Moran, 2014; Ostry, 2013; Rodríguez, 2016) deal with Westerfeld's novel, as only one study (Paravano, 2021) was available on *Flawed*.

A much more considerable part of the thesis was dedicated to the main method, the literary analysis of the two novels. This research method can be described as "detective work", since it involves reading the text multiple times and breaking it apart in a careful analysis, "comprehending the deep underlying meanings within and connections among them" (Kusch, 2016, pp. 20, 30). This process consisted of a close-reading and critical analysis of the literary texts, and was centred around common young adult and dystopian tropes that both authors address. These themes were divided into three groups: 1. identity, relationships and growing up; 2. ethical issues, society and governmental control; 3. environmental concerns. Corresponding to the interdisciplinary topics – health *and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*, these themes were linked to theory from previous studies through concrete examples from the novels.

Additionally, as my thesis examines the importance of YA dystopias for the English classes in Norway, particularly when teaching the interdisciplinary topics, a discussion of the relevant sections from the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum was introduced. The focus has been on three elements: the core values of education, from the core curriculum, the interdisciplinary topics, as explained in both documents, and the relevance of YA dystopias for the English subject.

I believe that the approach of combining a literature review and a literary analysis of the novels was effective for identifying the generic tropes of YA dystopian fiction. Further, discussing the theory and the concrete examples from the novels in relation to the curricula documents provides enough evidence of the relevance of YA dystopian literature when teaching the interdisciplinary topics in Norwegian secondary schools, thus answering the research question.

However, my thesis is subject to some limitations. My interest has been in the theoretical rationale for employing young adult dystopian literature in the English classes. Therefore, in order to achieve an in-depth analysis of the literary texts, it was beyond the scope of the project to include explicit classroom practical implementations. Moreover, this theoretical approach has permitted the inclusion of two whole books, something that is not possible in the classroom, but necessary for an analysis of the didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature. However, the approach developed in this thesis could be applied to extracts from the novels, for a more practical use.

1.5 Structure

This thesis is structured in six chapters. The current chapter reveals the purpose of the study, as well as the theoretical background, presenting some benefits of using literature in general in the classroom, a brief history of YA dystopian literature, and the revised curricula documents. An overview of the research methods and how they are applied during the study is also included in the introductory chapter. Chapter two is a literature review of previous studies, to place my own thesis in the context of the current field. In chapter three I present the curricula documents, discussing the key values and principles from the core curriculum, as well as the general relevance of YA dystopias for the English subject curriculum. Chapter four is a literary analysis of the two novels – *Uglies* and *Flawed* – with focus on common young adult and dystopian tropes (e.g., identity, ethical issues, governmental control, environmental concerns) addressed in the literary texts. Chapter five brings together previous studies, the curricula documents, and

the novels in a discussion of the findings concentrated on the relevance of the themes and topics from the books in relation to the values and principles from the curriculum. Finally, chapter six presents the concluding remarks of my thesis, as well as suggestions for further research.

2. Literature review

This chapter presents a review of previous literature which I consider relevant for my thesis. First, I am interested in seeing what the current tendencies in the educational field are, regarding the use of young adult dystopian literature in the classroom. Therefore, I will start by reviewing different studies which address the didactic benefits of this genre, focusing on the elements that can be connected to the interdisciplinary topics: *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*.

However, given the fact that these studies deal with, or are conducted exclusively with native speakers of English, the next step will be to narrow down the discussion to the Norwegian context. Although not much has been written on this topic in Norway, two recently published studies (Guanio-Uluru, 2019; Lyngstad, 2019) can shed light on the status that young adult dystopian literature has in Norwegian schools at this point, as well as on why and how this genre is, and could be used in the English classes in secondary schools.

Finally, I will bring into discussion some relevant works which examine different aspects addressed in the two novels chosen for this project. However, most of these studies either deal directly with *Uglies*, or just refer, in a broader context, to certain themes from the novel. On the other hand, "despite her undeniable achievements", Ahern's novel, *Flawed*, has not yet received much "critical and academic attention" as the author of the only study I could find on the novel recognises (Paravano, 2021, p. 199).

2.1 Didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature

The didactic benefits of literature, in general, were presented in section 1.2.1. However, many of these benefits can also be found in YA dystopian literature. This can be noticed in the recent focus on dystopias as suitable classroom material among various scholars (Marshall, 2014; Simmons, 2014; Wilkinson, 2010; Ames, 2013). In addition to the general benefits of literature, some of the advantages of using young adult dystopias in teaching include: motivating students to engage in social projects (Simmons, 2014), developing their critical literacy (Marshall, 2014), helping them understand the negative effects of consumerism (Wilkinson, 2010) and stimulating political engagement (Ames, 2013). Living in a world of continuous change, teachers are urged to keep pace with developments and, at the same time, to educate young people not only for the present, but for the future as well; that is, for the political and social climate of the twenty-first century. As Paugh (2014) explains, popular culture genres, including

dystopias, are "both complex and meaningful to youth and their lives" (p. 2). By bringing such texts into the classroom, and using them in critical ways, teachers can help their students "experience literacy as an empowering social practice important for full social participation and transformation in today's world" (Paugh, 2014, p. 2).

Simmons (2014) suggests that a popular genre like YA dystopian literature can be used to support students' critical literacy. More precisely, she uses Collins' *The Hunger Games* series to exemplify how bringing dystopias into the classroom can encourage social action. She focuses on those elements from the trilogy which are related to social injustice (hunger and forced labour), and proposes classroom activities meant to develop students' understanding of this issue, while simultaneously motivating them to take action, to develop and participate in social projects. Simmons borrows the definition of critical literacy from Darder, Baltodano and Torres, who explain the term as a "pedagogical process of teaching and learning, by which students and teachers interrogate the world, unmask ideological and hegemonic discourses, and frame their actions, in the interest of the larger struggle for social justice" (Darder et al., 2009, as cited in Simmons, 2014, p. 81). In order to successfully participate in social projects, students must first explore the literary texts, question and compare the fictional elements of dystopia with their own society, and consider the possibility that the social injustice they encounter in a novel might actually be part of the real world.

As Simmons explains, although some of the students might not be familiar with social injustice, by reading the books, they can gain insight into this topic. Further, this step will prepare them for actively participating in social projects that they develop individually or in groups, projects that require them to "take their learning into the community to benefit the greater good through the use of their learned skills" (Simmons, 2014, p. 82). For instance, students can develop projects such as: starting a food bank, raising awareness against food waste, creating advertisements for local fundraising campaigns, or even organising their own campaigns. These examples are suitable for interdisciplinary activities, as they "incorporate research, technology, expository and persuasive writing skills, public speaking, reflection, and creativity, not to mention the reading of the mentor text" (Simmons, 2014, p. 86). To sum up, Simmons presents practical ways through which teachers can bring YA dystopias into the classroom to help students understand critical issues with which society nowadays struggles, and, more importantly, to motivate them to participate in their community, to bring change. Therefore, implemented in the classroom, this approach could contribute to forming responsible, active citizens.

Similarly, Marshall's article (2014) analyses how using contemporary YA dystopian novels in the English Language Arts classes in secondary school in the United States can help students develop analytic and critical literacy skills. She refers both to the debate about learners' lack of critical thinking, and the standardised tests, which encourage them to study for obtaining good grades, instead of trying to understand the syllabus and find practical applications for what they learn. In doing so, she emphasises the importance of selecting relevant literature which can lead to developing students' critical literacy. She states that, in addition to being "consistently tested", teenagers nowadays are often asked to "read and produce texts that are of no relevance to them in spite of the fact that they may be avid participants in a wide variety of literacies in meaningful contexts outside of the classroom" (Marshall, 2014, p. 138). Therefore, bringing YA dystopian novels in school, preparing teaching materials based on these texts, can prove to be a great way of practising and improving critical literacy skills. Through teacher-led activities, textual analysis, and discussions, adolescents can really start to reflect on the texts they are reading, ask questions about important issues, and see things from different points of view. Analysing how themes such as gender, race, or ethnicity are addressed in contemporary YA dystopias, compared to a classical dystopian novel, can lead students to "consider the impact of generational differences, historical context, and authorial intent" (Marshall, 2014, p. 142). Such an analysis will lead them to start questioning whether their views are really theirs, or to what degree they are influenced by the social context in which they live, by their families, or the culture into which they were born.

In Wilkinson's (2010) article, the focus is on a different approach when it comes to using dystopian literature in an educational setting, namely on the dangers of consumerism. The author is concerned with the increased number of adolescents who struggle with depression and anxiety, which she calls "the characteristic dangers of the consumer class" (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 22). She suggests that elements of the modern world, such as diets based on processed foods, the constant chase after new and better things, and the need to spend money we do not have on things we do not need, have a negative impact on our lives, on our "physical, social, and psychological health" (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 22). She uses adult dystopian novels, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and M.T. Anderson's *Feed*, in which issues of the modern world are taken to the extreme, to stimulate her students to reflect on these topics and engage in purposeful discussions. This might not be an easy task, as they "love advertising, consuming, entertainment and technology" (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 22). Therefore, analysing the way these novels address the concepts of industry, consumption, and technology, can help students

deconstruct real-life contexts, "question and challenge the social forces that are informing their habits, decisions, and personalities" (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 25). This approach can lead to raising awareness among students about the negative effects of consumerism in the modern world, and prompt them to make important changes in their lives.

Lastly, Ames (2013) examines the educational value of dystopian literature by contrasting the popular opinion that American teenagers are apolitical with the fact that they are showing an increased interest in this genre, which often addresses political themes. Discussing the popularity of young adult dystopias after the September 11 attacks in the United States, she suggests that categorising young people as "apathetic or apolitical" might not be correct. While she agrees that the data from studies about civic responsibility (such as exercising your right to vote) or civic literacy (e.g., surveys about contemporary events) do seem to support the idea that American teenagers are disinterested in political affairs, she is critical of the fact that these studies are overly focused on the young generation and that, often, no data is provided for other age groups. Therefore, she concludes that the problem of civic illiteracy, or the lack of interest in political matters, might be "more of a cultural phenomenon, rather than an age-specific one" (Ames, 2013, p. 18). For Ames, the popularity of dystopian literature among adolescents is a strong indicator that "while these young readers may be disheartened by contemporary politics and under-informed in current events, they are not uninterested in the social problems that underlie both" (Ames, 2013, p. 18). Building on what Hintz and Ostry (2003, p. 7) say about dystopian literature encouraging young people to think critically and take political action, Ames argues that this genre can have a great impact on young learners. Reading it, especially in an educational context, can inspire students to become more politically active citizens.

Although, as previously mentioned, the studies reviewed here were suggested for, or conducted with L1 students, their relevance for the education system in Norway is undoubtable, especially considering values and principles from the core curriculum, such as *human dignity*, *critical thinking and ethical awareness*, *respect for nature and environmental awareness* and *democracy and participation* (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, pp. 6-10). These values stand as the cornerstone of education, and are all embedded in the interdisciplinary topics. The way Marshall (2014) and Simmons (2014) explain critical literacy is relevant to the concept of *critical thinking and ethical awareness*. Moreover, Simmons' (2014) proposal of social projects requires an understanding of *human dignity*. Similarly, Wilkinson's (2010) article includes ideas connected to *respect for nature and environmental awareness*, while Ames (2013) discusses important aspects that could be linked to *democracy and participation*. Therefore, I

find that the ideas promoted in these articles could be transferred to the Norwegian context, which will be the focus of the next section.

2.2 YA dystopian literature in the classroom – the Norwegian context

Extrapolating the arguments from the studies discussed in the previous section to the Norwegian context, YA dystopian literature is highly relevant for classroom use. However, a study conducted by Lyngstad (2019) during her doctoral research has shown that there is a discrepancy between the numerous positive effects of the genre and practice in Norway. The study employed mixed methods, and was structured in two phases. First, in a quantitative phase, 110 in-service teachers in upper secondary schools answered a questionnaire about what kind of literary texts and genres they use in their classes, as well as how and why they choose those specific texts. The second, qualitative phase, consisted of a case-study with eight participants, which examined how they assess specific young adult dystopian novels for classroom use.

The survey data suggest that this genre is not used enough in the English subject, considering the educational benefits revealed in the studies discussed above. Out of the 110 participants, just 12 % declared using fantasy, science-fiction, or dystopian literature often or always; 57% reported using them sometimes, while 31% stated that they used them rarely or never (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 230). As this question did not refer specifically to dystopias, but to speculative fiction literature in general, one can conclude that the numbers are even smaller for teachers using the dystopian genre.

The case-study revealed some similar results: with the exception of one teacher, none of the interviewees had much experience using dystopian literature with their students: four of them had never used this genre in their teaching, while the other three had used only one dystopian novel, although not necessarily one written specifically for young adults (Lyngstad, 2019, pp. 230-231). Based on these findings, one can only agree with Lyngstad (2019) when she states that "fantasy, science fiction, and dystopias are genres that are used sometimes, and that when they are used, it is perhaps as the odd novel rather than as genres that receive sustained attention" (p. 231). However, despite their lack of experience with the genre, all the participants in the case-study acknowledged the suitability of dystopian literature for classroom use, because of important topics it addresses, such as social and moral issues, environmental challenges, or aspects related to *Bildung* (pp. 240-247).

Therefore, Lyngstad's study, as the ones discussed earlier, demonstrates that dystopian literature has specific characteristics which make it suitable for classroom use. However, one question still remains: Why is it, then, that so few upper secondary English teachers choose to integrate this genre in their teaching sessions? Lyngstad (2019) explains, based on the results of her study, that the "biggest concerns for most teachers were whether the dystopian novels would fit in with the curriculum, and whether they would appeal to their students" (p. 234).

The relevance of Lyngstad's work for my own study lies in these findings. Her research was conducted prior to the revision of the curricula documents and the introduction of the interdisciplinary topics. While, at that time, teachers saw the benefits of dystopian literature for classroom use, and even for cross-curricular projects (Lyngstad, 2019, p. 245), they were still uncertain of how they could use it. Therefore, it is essential to understand the relevance of this genre for the interdisciplinary topics, as presented in the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum. My discussion in chapter 5 will demonstrate how the generic traits of YA dystopian literature intersect with the terms of the curriculum's interdisciplinary topics.

Nonetheless, there might be several reasons why teachers avoid bringing dystopian novels into the classroom. Another possible answer can be found in Guanio-Uluru's (2019) pilot study regarding the use of ecocritical literature circles in the student-teacher classroom, as means of preparing them to teach sustainable development. Although this study addresses only one of the interdisciplinary topics, there are two reasons why it is relevant for my thesis. First, it supports Wilkinson's (2010) and Lyngstad's (2019) ideas that young adult dystopian literature can be used to teach sustainable development. Second, its results could explain, to a certain extent, why English teachers in Norway do not incorporate this genre in their teaching, though, as previously shown, they do acknowledge its educational value (Lyngstad, 2019).

The study was conducted on Norwegian EFL student-teachers, and was seeking to find out whether the participants felt confident in employing literature as means of teaching sustainability issues, as well as their opinion on the effectiveness of teacher education in preparing them for this task. The project included a pre-questionnaire, followed by lectures on ecocriticism combined with reflection tasks and classroom discussions, literature circles, and, finally, a post-questionnaire.

Defined in the 1990s as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1992, as cited in Guanio-Uluru, 2019, p. 3), ecocriticism

examines the way literature addresses the relationship between humans and nature, focusing on contemporary environmental problems. As Guanio-Uluru (2019) explains, children's and young adult literature represent "fertile sites" for examining "culturally constructed figures and configurations of thought relative to nature and the environment" (p. 3). For this study, two best-selling YA dystopian novels were used: Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* trilogy. Based on the way they present the uses of biotechnology, these literary works are both suitable for such a project (Guanio-Uluru, 2019, pp. 11-12).

The results revealed that, prior to the study, none of the participants felt confident in their ability to address environmental issues in the EFL classes. However, after the lectures and the literature circles, during which they read and analysed the novels through an ecocritical lens, all of them reported feeling more or less prepared for teaching sustainable development to their future pupils. Based on these findings and the importance of the interdisciplinary topic *sustainable development*, one can agree with Guanio-Uluru's statement about the "gap between policies and practices" (Guanio-Uluru, 2019, p. 2). Even though they are expected to bring this topic into the classroom, and help their students understand what sustainable development implies, and how they can make responsible choices, student-teachers themselves lack the necessary instruction and methodology that can enable them to successfully accomplish this. Nonetheless, the fact that this study was conducted indicates that the problem is not unknown, and that, hopefully, change is on its way.

The didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature, therefore, are evident in that the genre can be used to teach critical thinking, encouraging social engagement and civic responsibility, and alerting young readers about environmental challenges. In order to demonstrate how these generic themes can be employed to teach the interdisciplinary topics, I will now introduce some relevant studies on the novels chosen for this study.

2.3 Didactic benefits of *Uglies* and *Flawed*

Westerfeld's young adult trilogy *Uglies* has been extensively discussed in different studies, from articles and book chapters to doctoral theses. Ostry (2013) focuses on environmental destruction, as well as the process of becoming an adult. She explains that the way the novel addresses the protagonist's relationship with both nature and technology can inspire young readers to re-evaluate their own attitudes towards these elements, and that this process will help them mature. Similarly, Arigo (2014) examines the novel from the perspective of ecocriticism,

arguing that the literary text can be understood as "a warning to younger generations about the socio-ecological behaviours" (p. 116). Rodríguez (2016), on the other hand, is mainly interested in the typical dystopian themes that *Uglies* addresses. Although he also mentions the environmental concerns, his analysis is centred on political aspects, such as totalitarian power, control and surveillance of the citizens.

Others, such as Fritz (2014), Moran (2014), and McDonough and Wagner (2014), explore Westerfeld's work from a different perspective, focusing on the personal development of the female protagonist and the rebellious attitude that she adopts. They follow Tally's journey, her transformation from the docile member of a "population almost completely incapable of rebelling against the status quo" (Moran, 2014, p. 123) into "the enlightened Tally", a character "of meaningful action, full of agency and purpose" (McDonough & Wagner, 2014, pp. 161-162). Furthermore, Donnelly (2019) is concerned with Tally's image as "the dystopian girl" who "through mentoring by other characters (…) ultimately becomes central to the dissolution of the dystopian state" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 8).

Similar to the last studies on *Uglies* mentioned above, the only study I could find on *Flawed* (Paravano, 2021) examines the development of the biracial protagonist, focusing on the way womanhood and race are represented in the novel. Paravano (2021) explains that "Celestine is unique for the way she fights for justice and equal opportunities, not only for her mixed-raced background" (p. 205). Further, she argues that the way the author portrays the protagonist can be an inspiration for female readers of any race as it "contributes to redefining, from a feminist angle, what it means to be a young woman in the 21st century" (Paravano, 2021, p. 200).

Though they focus on different elements from the novels, all these studies are relevant for the interdisciplinary topics. For instance, *health and life skills* includes themes such as identity and personal growth, which are addressed by Fritz (2014), Moran (2014), McDonough and Wagner (2014), and Paravano (2021) in their discussions about how the protagonists develop throughout the novels. Also, *democracy and citizenship* covers topics like human rights, equality, personal involvement and respect. In his analysis, Rodríguez (2016) touches upon all these themes. Furthermore, *sustainable development* promotes respect for nature and awareness about the potential dangers of developments such as technology. Both Ostry (2013) and Arigo (2014) discuss these elements in their articles.

As Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) explain, because of its "capacity to frighten and warn", dystopian literature "engages with pressing global concerns: liberty and self-determination,

environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self" (p. 1). This description of the genre, as well as the studies cited above refer to elements embedded in *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*. A detailed analysis of the relationship between these themes from the novels and the curricula documents will be done in chapter 5.

2.4 Concluding remarks

This review of previous studies has shown that YA dystopian literature is a relevant and teachable genre, especially in relation to the interdisciplinary topics, because of the way it addresses important issues, such as social and political engagement, environmental concerns, identity, and personal development. However, in the Norwegian context, despite the fact that teachers in upper secondary school recognise the educational benefits of YA dystopias, they are reluctant to use this genre. Moreover, it seems that, currently, teacher education does not provide student-teachers with the necessary tools that could enable them to integrate the interdisciplinary topics in the classroom.

3. The curricula documents

There are two documents that English teachers in secondary schools in Norway need to consider in their teaching practice: the core curriculum, and the English subject curriculum. This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of these documents. First, I will present the key values from the core curriculum, and discuss how they are linked to the interdisciplinary topics. Then, I will examine what *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development* mean for the educational system in Norway, in general, according to the core curriculum. Finally, I will look at the English subject curriculum, concentrating on the interdisciplinary topics, as well as other sections of the document which are relevant for a discussion about the didactic use of YA dystopias.

3.1 Core values

The core curriculum is a complex document which explains the purpose of education in primary and secondary schools in Norway, as well as those values and principles on which practice should be based. The document supports a holistic approach to education, where school has a "dual mission", as it is supposed to both educate students, and ensure their "all-round development", also known as *Bildung* (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 12). The purpose of education, therefore, is not just forming the next generations intellectually, offering them theoretical knowledge, but also helping them become independent, responsible citizens, who are able to think critically and solve problems and conflicts. The document introduces six core values, which represent "the foundation of our democracy" and are meant to help us "live, learn and work together in a complex world and with an uncertain future" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 6). These values are:

- *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*
- *democracy and participation*

The first value, *human dignity*, refers to the fact that, regardless of our differences, we are all equal. School should provide a suitable environment for students to learn about human rights

and equality, and also understand that these values are "in constant need of protection and reinforcement" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 6). By treating each student equally, offering them the same opportunities, and appreciating diversity, school can fight discrimination, and help children and teenagers to "experience belonging in school and society" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 7). Also, students should be encouraged to "think, believe and express" themselves freely. These principles play an important role in the process of growing up, as they will help young people to have a positive self-image, know their worth, and find their place in the world. Moreover, they will also learn to respect others, and make their voice heard in the fight against inequality and violation of human rights.

The second core value, *identity and cultural diversity*, is related to historical and cultural elements, and is meant to help students to "preserve and develop" their identity in an "inclusive and diverse environment" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 7). Gaining insight into the history and the shared cultural heritage of their society is important for students, as they can develop a sense of belonging, as well as learn to connect with others and coexist, even if they have different perspectives, lifestyles, and mentalities. The cultural diversity mentioned in the document refers not only to the indigenous Sami people, or the national minorities living in Norway, but, in a broader context, to the globalised world of which we are part. In the core curriculum, it is stated that: "School shall support the development of each person's identity, make the pupils confident in who they are, and also present common values that are needed to participate in this diverse society and to open doors to the world and the future" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 8). In other words, students should learn about their historical and cultural heritage, as these are important aspects of one's identity, but school should also provide the necessary tools that will help them become active members of a multicultural society.

Critical thinking and ethical awareness is the third value presented in the document, and deals with those aspects of students' education that should lead to "good judgement": an inquisitive attitude, critical reflection, and creative thinking (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, pp. 8-9). By asking questions, comparing and contrasting information from various sources, reflecting upon ideas and analysing them, students can develop critical thinking skills. They can start questioning what they think they know, and understand that their beliefs and perspectives are not necessarily correct or comprehensive. Critical thinking skills, combined with ethical awareness, are fundamental for the individual's personal growth, as they can help young people to better understand the world in which they live, and make independent, responsible decisions.

The fourth core value – *the joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore* – is focused on students' curiosity, their need to express themselves creatively, and put theory into practice. The core curriculum emphasises the importance of in-depth learning, which can be achieved by encouraging learners' sense of wonder, their need to examine things and experiment. The document states that creative activities used in school have several benefits, as students can learn not only to ask questions and express themselves, but also develop their problem-solving skills. Moreover, "creative learning processes are also a necessary part of the pupils' development as human beings, and in the development of their identity" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 9). Thus, school should ensure that children and young people get to experience different cultural expressions, and also encourage them in expressing their own opinions, thoughts, and feelings creatively.

The fifth value in the core curriculum is *respect for nature and environmental awareness* and refers to the need for teaching young people about nature in a way that will inspire them to respect and protect it. As it is explained in the document, students "must experience nature and see it as a resource and as a source of utility, joy, health and learning" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 9). By gaining knowledge about nature and spending time in it, they can understand its role in our world, learning to appreciate the resources it has to offer. Also, they can be made aware of the fact that people have a responsibility when it comes to the way we treat the environment, and how we use natural resources. They must learn about dangers such as global warming, pollution, and biodiversity loss, as well as the potential consequences of these challenges. Only then will they understand that people need to work together, and try to find solutions to these threats.

The last core value, *democracy and participation* is related to those principles and practices that can help form young people into responsible members of society. Students need to learn what democracy means and how it works in practice. School should "promote belief in the democratic values and in democracy as a form of government" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 10), and offer young people the possibility to practise these values, through "active participation". The document points out "mutual respect, tolerance, individual freedom of faith and speech, and free elections" as essential elements of democracy. All students should have equal rights, and be given the possibility to express their opinion when decisions are made. Also, they should learn to communicate with others with respect, even when they disagree. This will help them understand and value the importance of democracy, and make them able to engage in dialogue and collaborate with people who do not share their point of view.

3.2 The interdisciplinary topics in the core curriculum

The core curriculum introduces the three interdisciplinary topics by stating that they are "based on prevailing societal challenges which demand engagement and effort from individuals and local communities, nationally and globally" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15). In so doing, the document points out the importance that these topics play in the education and development of children and young adults as independent individuals, as well as members of a society, active citizens involved in their community. This reinforces the idea that school should facilitate an "all-round development". Working with these topics in all subjects will open up the possibility of introducing current problems and dilemmas that society today faces, as well as help students understand "where we can find solutions through knowledge and collaboration" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15).

The first interdisciplinary topic in the core curriculum, *health and life skills*, is meant to offer students "competence which promotes sound physical and mental health" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15). The document highlights the importance that childhood years and adolescence play in the individual's formation. It is crucial that, during these stages of life, one can form a strong, positive self-image and develop a confident personality. Further, it is explained that "life skills refers to the ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15). School should, therefore, offer children and young adults the possibility to acquire knowledge about a healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally, as well as skills that will help them face adulthood and all the challenges that come with it. Making wise health decisions, dealing with accomplishments, as well as disappointments, having healthy relationships with others, based on mutual respect, and dealing with emotions and thoughts, are all abilities that one acquires in the process of growing up. Thus, *health and life skills* is intended to prepare young people for life, to help them develop their identity, understand themselves and the world around them.

Democracy and citizenship, the second interdisciplinary topic, involves familiarising students with the basics of democracy, with the purpose of preparing them to become responsible, active members of society. The core curriculum stresses the need for teaching young people about the democratic values and the importance of fundamental human rights like "freedom of speech, the right to vote and freedom of association" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 16). Also, they should understand that, in a democratic society, personal rights and the individual's obligations

go hand in hand. All people have equal rights, and they should be treated with respect, regardless of their differences. At the same time, "democracy cannot be taken for granted", but needs to be "developed and maintained" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 16), through personal involvement and engagement of every member of society. By exercising their right to participate in political decisions, citizens support the further development of democracy. The document states that school has a duty to offer children and adolescents both knowledge and skills which will help them deal with challenges and dilemmas in the future. This should be done practically, by creating teaching situations in which students "train their ability to think critically, learn to deal with conflicts of opinion and respect disagreement" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 16). This way, school can prepare students for the future, for becoming reliable members of their community.

The third interdisciplinary topic, *sustainable development*, addresses the relationship between developments in society, such as technology, and the challenges that these developments may pose. Students should learn about present dangers, as well as how to deal with dilemmas and threats concerning the environment. The document specifies that "sustainable development refers to protecting life on earth and providing for the needs of people who live here now without destroying the possibilities for future generations to fill their needs" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 16). Understanding that the way we choose to live today has potential catastrophic consequences for the future, and accepting the ethical responsibility people have to protect nature and the environment, will help the young generation to make sound decisions, not only on an individual level, but also as members of a local or global community. Besides concerns about the environment and climate change, this topic covers a number of other important issues that students should gain insight into, such as unequal distribution of resources, health, or education. By approaching the different facets of sustainable development, school can ensure that students understand the interdependence between social situations, economics and environmental circumstances.

As already mentioned, the core values, presented in the previous section, and the interdisciplinary topics are interconnected. Together, they play an essential role in the process of education. There is an obvious link between *respect for nature and environmental awareness* and the interdisciplinary topic *sustainable development*, as well as between *democracy and participation* and *democracy and citizenship.* However, all of the core values can be connected to at least one of the interdisciplinary topics. For instance, both *human dignity* and *identity and cultural diversity* play a part in *democracy and citizenship*, as they both include democratic

principles. The fact that all people are equal, that we need to accept and respect our differences, including cultural ones, is a basic condition in a democratic society. Moreover, *identity and cultural diversity* could also be linked to *health and life skills* if we consider how important identity and the sense of belonging are for one's personal development. Knowing our origins, where we come from, and where we belong, is crucial in defining who we are.

Similarly, *critical thinking and ethical awareness* is an important value for all the interdisciplinary topics, as it plays a key role in personal growth. The "good judgment", that one acquires through thinking critically and acting with ethical awareness, can reflect in making good, healthy decisions not only on a personal level, but also in regard to the environment, or in relation with other people, in potential conflicts and disagreements. Further, *the joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore* can also be related to the three interdisciplinary topics. Encouraging students to express what they think and feel creatively can have a positive impact on their identity development, as well as their self-image, which are both part of *health and life skills*, as presented in the English subject curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3). Likewise, young people's creative abilities can be used in various cross-curricular social projects (Simmons, 2014), for raising awareness about environmental concerns, or for promoting democratic values.

The overview of the interdisciplinary topics in this section introduces the general principles related to *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*, as presented in the core curriculum. The document explains that the specific goals students are expected to reach when working with these topics are listed under the curriculum for each subject. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the English subject curriculum as well, particularly the way the document addresses the three interdisciplinary topics.

3.3 The English subject curriculum

The English subject curriculum is the other key document for English teachers in their practice, in addition to the more general core curriculum. For the purpose of my thesis, the most obviously relevant section of the document is the one referring to the interdisciplinary topics. However, other sections of the document (*Relevance and central values*, *Core elements*, *Basic skills*, *Competence aims and assessment*) contain ideas that indirectly support the use of YA dystopian literature in the English classes. Consequently, after discussing how the English

subject curriculum presents the interdisciplinary topics, a short review of the other sections is necessary.

3.3.1 The interdisciplinary topics in the English subject curriculum

Section 3.2 was focused on how the core curriculum addresses the three interdisciplinary topics. The English subject curriculum includes only two of these topics: *health and life skills* and *democracy and citizenship*, and explains how they apply to the subject. The first is centred around the idea that students should learn to "express their feelings, thoughts, experiences and opinions" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3). This implies the need for developing both oral and writing skills. When learners possess the necessary tools to efficiently communicate with others, they will be able not only to express themselves in different situations, but also to acquire "new perspectives on different ways of thinking and communication patterns" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3). This will lead to a sense of accomplishment for students. The document suggests that acquiring both linguistic and cultural competence can contribute to developing a positive self-perception and a confident identity.

The second interdisciplinary topic in the English subject curriculum, *democracy and citizenship*, is related to the fact that learning English can open up new possibilities for the students, as they can experience different cultures and societies. The contact with other societies will help students to better understand their own, and realise that their perspective of the world is influenced by the culture in which they are raised. The document states that this "can open for new ways to interpret the world, and promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudices" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3), thus supporting democratic values.

Although the English subject curriculum does not include the third interdisciplinary topic, it does not mean that *sustainable development* should not be taught in the English subject at all. Considering that the core curriculum (which contains all three of the interdisciplinary topics) is a general document, for all education and training, one can conclude that it is up to each teacher to assess whether or not this topic is equally relevant for the English classes as the other two interdisciplinary topics. Moreover, as shown in chapter 2, one of the didactic benefits of YA dystopian literature is that it can be used to address environmental concerns. Based on these considerations, my discussion in chapter 5 will refer to all of the interdisciplinary topics, *sustainable development* included.

3.3.2 The relevance of YA dystopian literature for the English subject

The English subject curriculum starts by establishing the *relevance and central values* of the subject in the Norwegian education system. There are four essential elements related to the subject, that should be addressed in the English classes: *cultural understanding*, *communication*, *all-round development*, and *identity development* (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 2). The document emphasises the need for teaching students to communicate and connect with people of various cultural backgrounds, and to open new perspectives about the world. Some of these ideas are similar to concepts from the core curriculum (e.g., the value of *identity and cultural diversity*, the notion of *Bildung*), and are also common in YA dystopian literature.

Further, the document lists the *core elements* of the subject. One of them, *working with texts*, is meant to help students not only improve their linguistic and cultural knowledge, but also gain insight into different lifestyles and mentalities, developing their intercultural competence. The document explains that this will enable students to "deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3). This particular statement makes this section of the document highly relevant for my thesis, for several reasons. First, it supports the idea mentioned in chapter 1, that literature can be used to promote intercultural competence in the English classes (Bland, 2020; Lütge, 2013). Second, it is related to the core value *identity and cultural diversity* and, thus, to the interdisciplinary topic *democracy and citizenship*, as shown in section 3.1. Third, my discussion in chapter 5 will also refer to identity and democracy as some of the key themes in YA dystopian literature.

Also, in the *basic skills* section, the document stresses the importance of reading various types of texts. Defined as the ability to understand and reflect on texts, reading has two more advantages: it promotes both language acquisition and pleasure. This is compatible with what Carlsen (2018) and Krashen (2013) state about using extensive reading in the classroom for motivating students to read more, as well as improving their language skills, in general.

Lastly, the *competence aims and assessment* section lists the competence aims that students are expected to acquire. Only those aims which can be directly linked to the use of YA dystopian literature in secondary school will be discussed. However, this does not mean that one cannot reach the other competence aims from the subject curriculum through working with this genre,

considering the general didactic benefits of literature, mentioned in section 1.3.1. Among the competence aims that students are expected to acquire by the end of year 10, there is one aim that specifically mentions fiction genres and YA literature as suitable alternatives for the English classes, stating that students should be able to: "read, interpret and reflect on English-language fiction, including young people's literature" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 9). Similarly, in upper secondary school, students in general studies (VG1) are supposed to develop their ability to "read, analyse and interpret fictional texts in English" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 12). Regardless of whether they are meant for students in lower or upper secondary school, by employing words such as "interpret", "reflect on", and "analyse", both these aims suggest that students can develop their critical literacy skills by reading fiction genres, thus supporting Marshall's (2014) and Simmons' (2014) ideas about the benefits of YA dystopias.

3.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have looked at the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum. The purpose has been to identify and discuss the sections from the documents related to the use of literature in the classroom and the three interdisciplinary topics. As has been shown in this chapter, there is a clear connection between the values and principles from the core curriculum, the interdisciplinary topics and the typical themes that dystopian literature addresses. The statement regarding the core values, which should prepare children and young people to "live, learn and work together in a complex world and with an uncertain future" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 6), is in perfect harmony with the use of YA dystopian literature in school, as it is exactly such worlds (complex and with an uncertain future) that this genre portrays. Moreover, several sections of the English subject curriculum (including some competence aims) support the idea of using dystopian novels in the English classes. My discussion of the curricula documents, therefore, confirms the compatibility of YA dystopian literature with the core values, which can be taught through the interdisciplinary topics. This will be further reinforced through concrete examples from the two novels in the discussion in chapter 5.

4. Literary analysis

As mentioned in section 1.2, where I justify my choice of the novels, both *Uglies* and *Flawed* deal with the idea of perfection. The ideals of a perfect body and a flawless morality are expected to be achieved through strict rules and governmental control. In *Uglies*, all sixteen-year-olds must go through a compulsory extensive surgery which transforms them into "pretties". In Ahern's novel, the fear of becoming an outcast, of being branded as "Flawed" for the smallest moral mistake, keeps people in line, in accordance with society's moral laws. This theme of control is essential in the context of adolescence. In addition to being at an age where they challenge authority figures and resist control, teenagers "begin paying more attention to the structures and systems that lie ahead", including "more abstract systems, such as moral standards and social norms" (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013, p. 3).

Although the main theme in *Uglies* is a perfect body image, as the author himself declares in an article on his blog, the book includes other relevant topics for teenagers, such as belonging, control and surveillance (Westerfeld, 2012, para. 4). Even if Westerfeld did not intend to address such topics specifically, based on his young readers' feedback, he later declares that "dystopian literature is just like high school: an oscillation between extremes of restraint" (para. 1). Further, he explains that young readers are drawn to dystopian literature because of the reality they face during adolescence – a reality characterised by restrictions, control and surveillance (para. 2). Within this world, body image and the extensive use of plastic surgery negatively affects young people, who, unlike adults, "possess fewer skills and resources to escape" this trend (Westerfeld, 2012, para. 11).

Flawed, on the other hand, deals with the notion of a flawless morality. In an interview at the *L.A Times Festival of Books* in 2016, Ahern discloses that her inspiration for writing the novel stems from our "judgmental society", from the fact that we so easily "label", "finger-point" and "publicly shame" people when they make a mistake (PBS Books, 2016). She also explains that the message she wants to transmit to teenagers is that "it is okay to be flawed, we all are flawed, nobody is perfect" (PBS Books, 2016, min. 6:43). Moreover, the fact that the book is dedicated to her father, a public figure, cannot be disregarded. Bertie Ahern served as taoiseach (prime minister of the Republic of Ireland) from 1997 to 2008, when he resigned, during an investigation into allegations of financial corruption (Marsh, 2021). In the same interview, Ahern mentions "a kind of anger that was building up" every time she read "another story about somebody who has to quit their job because of some decision that they have made" (PBS Books,

2016, min. 4:15). Therefore, another important message of her book could be the concept of forgiveness for past mistakes.

According to Hilton and Nikolajeva (2012), YA literature "can link society's turbulence, its most pressing and disturbing issues, with the adolescent's quest for identity in coming of age" (p. 9). Similarly, Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) argue that: "In emphasizing the trials of adolescents, YA dystopias recapitulate the conventions of the classic *Bildungsroman*, using political strife, environmental disaster, or other forms of turmoil as the catalyst for achieving adulthood" (p. 7). Through a close-reading of the novels, I will identify and discuss some typical traits of both YA literature in general (e.g., coming of age, relationships, social issues), as well as YA dystopias, focusing on the themes that Westerfeld and Ahern address in their works – identity, agency, governmental control, etc. All these themes are relevant for my thesis, as there is an obvious link between them and the core values from the curriculum. This will be further discussed in chapter 5. In order to demonstrate how these aspects of YA dystopias serve the interdisciplinary topics – *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development* – the central themes of my analysis will be divided into three groups, as follows: 1. identity, relationships, and growing up; 2. ethical issues, society, and governmental control; 3. environmental concerns.

Both *Uglies* and *Flawed* include the themes mentioned above. However, the references to environmental problems are much more numerous in Westerfeld's novel than in Ahern's. Consequently, section 4.3, which deals with this topic, will mainly focus on *Uglies*. Therefore, to ensure a balanced approach to the novels across the thesis, and because morality is the central theme in Ahern's novel, section 4.2 (Ethical issues, society, and governmental control), will be centred on *Flawed*.

4.1 Identity, relationships, and growing up

Both novels include the idea of *Bildung* – which occupies an essential place in the educational system in Norway (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 3) – by following the evolution and transformation of the protagonists: Tally Youngblood in *Uglies* and Celestine North in *Flawed*. The authors use different narrative techniques. *Flawed* is narrated in the first person, thus the reader has direct access to Celestine's inner thoughts, whereas Westerfeld's novel is written from a third-person perspective. However, the narrator is not omniscient, but rather tells the story through Tally's eyes, gradually revealing what she experiences, thinks, and feels.

Through the narrative perspectives employed, the books present two examples of the ideology society imposes on its young members' character evolution. On one hand, the first person narrative in *Flawed* could be used to emphasise the accord between the self and society – Celestine fits perfectly within the "flawless" society. As long as her identity melts into that of the societal ideal, she is accepted, and even praised. Moreover, the first person narration "allows" young readers "the privilege of identifying" with the protagonist and access to "the immediacy and intensity of experience and emotions" (Williams, 2021, pp. 147-148). On the other hand, even if the story in *Uglies* is told through Tally's eyes, Westerfeld employs a third-person narrative. This could suggest that the protagonist, who has not yet achieved the level of perfection that society imposes (the physical beauty is a future ideal), does not have a voice, but needs an auxiliary character, somebody to tell the readers what she thinks and feels. Therefore, both narrative techniques are used to show two different phases of development of young adults and the role society plays within them.

Of similar age, the protagonists start their journey as total opposites – one with a seemingly well-defined identity, and the other as an insecure adolescent – but, after a series of adventures and challenges, they are both radically transformed. By the end of the novels, Tally and Celestine share a rebellious attitude against what they thought was a perfect, just society, as they both challenge the hegemonic discourse. Their relationships with other characters play an important role in the protagonists' development. While their parents prove to be unreliable, Tally and Celestine find other characters they can count on for moral guidance. Both Westerfeld and Ahern use such characters, who help the protagonists to define themselves and eventually grow up, in order to guide young readers.

4.1.1 Identity

Since they target young, immature readers, who need to develop a sense of responsibility, to define their values, and learn to make their own choices, both novels address the concept of identity, which constitutes an essential element of *Bildung*. However, they do this in different ways. On one hand, *Flawed* introduces a mature protagonist who seems to have a clearly-defined identity. The first chapter of the book, a self-description of Celestine, consists of only two sentences: "I am a girl of definitions, of logic, of black and white. Remember this" (Ahern, 2016, p. 1). She is a smart girl: "I excelled in school – I adore information and am always hungry to know more" (p. 49), and is described as "perfect" by everyone around her: "I am perfect. My parents say so, my teachers say so, my boyfriend and even my sister – who hates

me – say so" (p. 63). Also Marlena, one of her oldest friends, characterises her as "logical, loyal, fun, but always staying between the rules" (p. 120).

Apparently, this smart, popular seventeen-year-old has an ideal life. She comes from a good family, lives with her parents and her two siblings, and she has an equally perfect boyfriend, Art. He is handsome and funny and makes her happy: "*Perfect* is a word I use a lot to describe Art or any moment with him" (Ahern, 2016, p. 29). Celestine has clear plans for her future, which she has made together with her boyfriend: "Art and I have talked about it. We want to study at the city university: me, mathematics; him, science. We have it all worked out" (p. 28). Based on these descriptions, Celestine seems to be a mature, balanced teenager, who knows exactly what she wants from life and what she needs to do to accomplish her plans. Moreover, she has clearly defined moral values. This might have something to do with the fact that she has a good relationship with Judge Bosco Crevan, her boyfriend's dad. Crevan is the head of the Guild, the committee that "oversees the inquisition of individuals accused of being Flawed" (p. 5). As she admits it herself, she is "one of Bosco's greatest supporters" (p. 26), knowing the difference between right and wrong, as defined by her society.

Tally Youngblood, on the other hand, is presented in *Uglies* as an insecure girl who spends her nights "awake in bed, feeling sorry for herself" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 4), and looks forward to her sixteenth birthday, when the surgery will change her life forever. Unlike Celestine, Tally seems to lack an identity: she was raised to think that she – like all the other children aged twelve to sixteen years – is ugly, and that becoming "pretty" is a privilege that the government is granting them: "I want to be happy, and looking like a real person is the first step" (p. 80). After turning twelve, she moved from her parents' house to the dorm in Uglyville, where she has to live until her surgery. Although she is almost sixteen, Tally is described as quite childish, spending her nights sneaking out of the dorm, watching the "pretties" partying on the other side of the river, and playing tricks in the woods. She used to do this with her best friend, Peris who, being three months older than her, had already had his surgery and moved to New Pretty Town. Although, just like Celestine, she has complete faith in her society and she accepts everything she has been taught, without questioning, Tally's identity is not formed yet, and the only plan she has for her life is to become a "pretty" and be reunited with her friend.

As adolescence often "entails traumatic social and personal awakening", young people "recognize the faults and weaknesses" of their society and eventually rebel against it (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 9). Both Tally and Celestine experience such an "awakening". Despite the

differences between the two girls, as first introduced in the novels, what *Uglies* and *Flawed* have in common, regarding the theme of identity, is what happens to the protagonists once they embark on a quest of self-discovery.

There is a key moment in each of the novels when the protagonists need to make a moral choice that goes against the social consensus, marking the beginning of their journey towards maturity. In *Uglies*, everything starts with Tally's new friend, Shay, refusing to have the surgery and running away to a secret place, called the Smoke. Tally is threatened that she will never become pretty, unless she betrays her friend, leading the authorities to Shay and the other runaways: "Until you do help us, to the very best of your ability, you will never be pretty (…) You can die ugly for all I care" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 106). The authorities use Tally's need for social acceptance to manipulate her into compliance.

In *Flawed*, the protagonist's life is turned upside down after the bus scene. When an old "Flawed" man starts coughing violently on the bus and has no place to sit, because the only two seats reserved for the *Flawed* are occupied, Celestine intervenes. Helping a *Flawed* is in itself considered a moral mistake and leads to imprisonment (Ahern, 2016, p. 54). Suddenly, Celestine, the "perfect" girl, is accused of being "Flawed" and has some tough decisions to make during her trial: to lie, or stand by her actions and face the consequences. Choosing between these alternatives seems irrational for the girl "of logic": "They want me to lie (…) But even to lie is to be Flawed. To gain my freedom, I must for the first time become Flawed. It doesn't make sense. It is illogical" (p. 68). Echoing the Rosa Parks incident during the racial segregation in the United States, Ahern's description of this episode is significant, showing that, although this is a dystopian scenario, moral choices sometimes go against social norms, and even laws.

After these turning points, both girls gradually discover that the "truths" of their societies are constructions for power and control. Consequently, they slowly start looking at things from a different perspective. Lafuente (2012) refers to such episodes as a typical trait of YA literature:

> Many novels targeting young people focus on a disruption in the life of the protagonists and the subsequent personal growth that the character experiences. These disruptions often propel the main character forth on a journey – literal, metaphorical, or both – that leads to self-discovery, a higher level of emotional maturity, in general, a greater awareness of her identity. (p. 33)

While Celestine needs to completely redefine who she is, as she is no longer externally defined as "perfect" but "Flawed", Tally is only now defining herself. Therefore, the common message of the novels for young people could be that, regardless of where they come from and who they think they are, the journey from adolescence to adulthood is an individual one. It requires reflection, self-inquiry and taking responsibility for their actions and beliefs. They might need to start questioning what they were taught and redefine the values that were forced on them before they can make their own decisions.

4.1.2 Relationships

Even if the process of self-discovery is an individual one, the relationships with other people can have an impact on adolescents, influencing their values, habits, and decisions. Being YA novels, both *Uglies* and *Flawed* aim at guiding young readers. One of the ways the authors accomplish this is through how they present the protagonists' relationships with secondary characters, such as parents, antagonists, role models, educators, and companions. Through their interactions with these characters, the protagonists and, implicitly, the young readers, start to define themselves, their society and their place in it.

Although parents are expected to be moral examples and mentors, both Tally and Celestine have parents that do not play an essential positive role in their development. On the contrary, when they first get in trouble with the authorities, Tally and Celestine have similar experiences: they feel alone and confused. At first, though she feels like she has disappointed her parents, Tally thinks that she can count on them: "Tally felt a weight lift from her shoulders. Finally there was someone else on her side. Her father's middle-pretty eyes twinkled with calm certainty. There was no question that he would sort everything out" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 111). However, the more she tries to explain the situation, the more insecure she feels, realising that her parents have no clue of what is happening outside the cities:

> Tally looked at her father, and for a moment she saw something other than wisdom and confidence in his expression (…) For the first time in her life, Tally found herself listening to a middle pretty without being completely reassured, a realization that made her dizzy. (p. 113)

Similarly, when her parents come to see her in the holding cell, prior to the trial, Celestine feels abandoned: "The first real contact I've had since this happened and I was hoping for defence, for back-up, not for an attack, not for my own mother to agree with them and point the finger

at me" (Ahern, 2016, p. 65). Moreover, the advice they give her – to lie – is the opposite of everything else she had been taught: "Forget everything we taught you. Right now, forget about right and wrong. This is for your *life*, Celestine" (p. 66). This moment creates a huge confusion in Celestine's mind: "I don't recognize her, and that means I no longer recognize the world. They are my roots, my foundations, and they sit before me now uprooted and saying things I never thought they'd say" (p. 67).

These experiences represent what Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) call an "awakening", which "includes a realization of how ruined the adult world has become: kids learn adults are lying, their parents have problems, the system can't protect them, they have to take care of themselves" (p. 7). Tally realises that she knows more about the outside world than her parents do, whereas Celestine is shocked to discover that things are not always black and white, not even for the people closest to her, whom she considered ethical role models.

The authors are furthering the idea of the adult world as different than what the teenagers expect, re-emphasising "awakening moments". The morals are skewed, society is governed by power relations, and the so-called role models are unreliable. After meeting the antagonists, the protagonists will start to decide for themselves on morals, society, and role models. The encounters that Tally and Celestine have with these authority figures have a double effect: they provide information and lead to a rebellious attitude. After experiencing first-hand how these people work, as well as the manipulative techniques they are using, the girls start to learn about the way their societies are ruled and controlled, and, consequently, they adopt an attitude of defiance, for the first time.

In both novels, the antagonist is a representative of a governmental organisation: Dr. Cable, from Special Circumstances in *Uglies*, and Bosco Crevan, the head judge of the Guild, in *Flawed*. Besides their position of authority, these characters share some common traits. Both of them are manipulative, hiding their true face. They try to convince Tally and Celestine of the fact that they want what is best for them. It is not until later that they reveal what they are actually capable of.

For example, during her first encounter with Dr. Cable, Tally is told, once again, about how lucky she is: "This city is a paradise, Tally. It feeds you, educates you, keeps you safe. It makes you pretty" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 103). Dr. Cable tries to convince her of the fact that what is outside of the city limits is dangerous, and that Shay did not leave willingly: "They

didn't run away on their own. They were tempted by someone from outside, someone who wanted to steal our cleverest little uglies" (pp. 104-105). When Tally decides that she cannot betray her friend, Dr. Cable's attitude changes: "the woman became nothing but a monster, vengeful and inhuman" (p. 106).

A similar thing happens to Celestine. Though she knows Judge Crevan, the series of encounters she has with him, after being arrested, slowly reveal his true character. At first, he tries to comfort her: "you have always been one of my greatest supporters. You're going to be just fine" (Ahern, 2016, p. 71). However, he soon starts making decisions for her, commanding her to lie: "and when they ask you about helping the old man into a seat, you say that you did not, that he sat there himself" (p. 78). Things become even more difficult after Celestine decides that she cannot lie and blame an innocent man. During her trial she declares:

> He was coughing and I thought he was going to die. I didn't care if he was Flawed; I just saw a person, a human being, who reminded me of my granddad, who no one else was helping. So, to answer your question, as to what possessed me … the answer is, compassion. And logic. He didn't take a seat, I helped him into it. (Ahern, 2016, p. 129)

After this scene, she gets one last chance from Crevan, who asks her to recant. When she refuses, his intentions are clear: he will use her to send a message to all the other people questioning the Guild's authority. He announces that she will get not one, but five brands, being the first person in history to ever receive all of them. During her branding, Celestine finally understands what Crevan is capable of: "Now I find him terrifying. I see the evil in him" (Ahern, 2016, p. 152). His rage grows out of proportions and he orders that she get a sixth brand. When his people hesitate, showing their individual consciences, he grabs the iron and brands her himself (p. 158).

The way Westerfeld and Ahern portray Tally and Celestine as defiant teenagers could be read as an attempt to give a direction to young people's rebellious behaviour. The protagonists' attitude is not seen as dangerous, nor damaging, but rather suggests a strong character that will lead to agency and responsibility. The triggering element in both cases is the antagonist. Dr. Cable's attitude towards Tally determines the girl to not show any weakness in front of her: "A lump rose in her throat, but Tally decided that under no circumstances – special or not – was she going to cry in front of Dr. Cable" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 127). Similarly, when

Celestine is in the Branding Chamber, about to get her flesh seared with the "Flawed" symbol, terrified at the thought that her family – who must witness her torture – will hear her scream, she decides that she would not let that happen: "I will not scream. Feeling defiant, I believe this is the first time I have ever truly felt it. The first time on the bus was compassion (…) but now I feel anger, and I am defiant" (Ahern, 2016, p. 145). Throughout the novels, this attitude will evolve into a fundamental trait of their character.

The examples mentioned so far have shown how the relationships with their parents and the antagonists open up the way to discovery and growth for Tally and Celestine. However, the characters that play the most important role when it comes to the self-development of the protagonists, are the role-models, the educators, and the companions they meet on their journey. These are the people who have access to information, which in YA dystopias is, as Basu Broad and Hintz (2013) explain it, "the only way to become free" (p. 4). There are several such characters in both novels.

In *Uglies*, Shay is the only person Tally knows who disagrees with what they were told and taught in school. There are several dialogues between the two girls where a clear difference between them can be noticed. While Tally is insecure and naïve, accepting that she is "ugly" and believing that she needs the surgery to have a normal life, Shay has a totally different opinion about the surgery and what it does to people: "I don't want to be pretty (…) I'm sick of this city (…) I'm sick of the rules and boundaries. The last thing I want is to become some empty-headed new pretty, having one big party all day" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 80). She does not think of herself as "ugly" and she tries to convince Tally that the way society defines beauty is wrong:

> We're not freaks, Tally. We're normal (…) You've only seen pretty faces your whole life. Your parents, your teachers, everyone over sixteen. But you were not *born* expecting that kind of beauty in everyone, all the time. You're just programmed into thinking anything else is ugly. (p. 79)

In addition to having a strong opinion about the surgery, Shay seems to possess a lot of knowledge about things that are unknown to Tally. For example, she knows much more about the past than what the "uglies" were taught in school. Similarly, she is the one who takes Tally to the Rusty Ruins, outside the city, and leads her, eventually, to the Smoke, where the escapees

are hiding. Therefore, the process of Tally's development starts with Shay, who shows her an alternative to the life imposed on them by society.

Threatened by Special Circumstances, pressured by her parents and faced with the dilemma of choosing between her best friend, Peris, and her new friend, Shay, Tally decides that she has no choice but to do what it is asked of her, and help Dr. Cable find the runaways. After a long trip through the forest and the ruins, following Shay's coded instructions, Tally arrives at the secret settlement, the Smoke. It is here that she meets the source of Shay's knowledge – David.

Unlike the other "Smokies", David is not a runaway, he was born in the Smoke (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 207). He introduces Tally to his parents, former cosmetic surgeons from the city. This is how the protagonist finds out the truth about the surgery and the reason why they run away: "Becoming pretty doesn't just change the way you look (…) It changes the way you think" (p. 254). Except for people who have a job considered essential in society (e.g., politicians, doctors, firefighters, Special Circumstances agents), all the "pretties" have "lesions" on their brain after the surgery (pp. 250-252). These "lesions" work as a metaphor for the alienation of citizens through governmental control. Seen as a negligible mass, regular people have paid the price of attractiveness and a life of entertainment with their freedom of thought and action. Discovering this dark secret about her society represents the turning point for Tally. Before the encounter with David's parents, though she had gotten used to life in the Smoke, learning to enjoy the hard work and the connection with nature, Tally was still planning to return to the city and become "pretty". Now, on the other hand, the decision to stay with the runaways is much easier.

While Shay marks the beginning of Tally's transition to another way of living and thinking, David, as the complete outsider, but with knowledge of both worlds, pushes her transformation towards its completion. By describing Tally's incremental exposure to knowledge, Westerfeld is commenting on the role this process plays in the development of his young readers. Discovering various truths, teenagers discover themselves, while beginning the process of discerning between a variety of alternatives.

Similarly, in her novel, Ahern uses three key characters that help Celestine develop into a strong moral figure. The first one is her maternal grandfather, who, like David in *Uglies*, lives outside the city – on a farm. This detail is significant in relation to surveillance as a common dystopian trope. While in the urban environment the citizens' needs are fulfilled, this lifestyle has its

drawbacks. The well-established limits of the city facilitate the strict control of the authorities, limiting the individual's freedom. In contrast with urban life, nature is, as Rodríguez (2016) explains, "the only escape for dissidents, who must hide there" (p. 80).

Although Celestine rarely sees her grandfather, when he comes to visit her, the day of her trial, he proves to be much more supportive than her parents. He is the only adult in her life who, from the very beginning, encourages her to stay true to herself, to stand by her decisions and to not give in under Crevan's threats: "You tell the truth in court today, Celestine. And if they tell you that you are Flawed, then you wear that like a badge of honour" (Ahern, 2016, p. 111). He is a wise man, and he has been collecting information about Crevan and the Guild, information that he wants to share with Celestine (p. 108). Moreover, he is proud of her and he has faith that she can be an inspiration for other people:

> The people who want change are just begging you to be their girl. Don't let the Guild wrap you up in their bloody red wings and make you think you're one of them. You're not, and you will never be. Seize the moment, Celestine, and *say* it. Give a voice to those who are silenced. (p. 111)

Thus, her grandfather is the only person the protagonist can trust, and he plays the role of both an educator and a companion, providing her not only information, but also support and help on several occasions.

The second character who helps out the protagonist is her maths teacher. When Celestine is banished from school, Ms. Dockery offers to home-school her. In reality, she is using the private lessons as a pretext for informing Celestine about a secret movement against the Guild, as well as her own opinions. She is living a double life, making it difficult for Celestine to trust her. Ms. Dockery's husband is "Flawed", and she has chosen to get a tattoo of the "Flawed" sign on her abdomen: "And there are many more people with these tattoos. We see being Flawed as a strength, Celestine. If you make a mistake, you learn from it. If you never make a mistake, you're never the wiser" (Ahern, 2016, p. 321).

Ahern uses the contrast between the forced branding of people by the authorities and the choice made by the rebels to tattoo the same mark as a statement to show the divergence between an imposed identity and an identity chosen by the individuals. By transforming a sign of rejection into a "badge of honour", they show their reconciliation with themselves. Through this example,

Celestine is encouraged to search for her own truth, and she understands that there is already a community ready to accept her.

The character that gives Celestine a strong sense of belonging and has the most powerful influence on her is Carrick Vane, an eighteen-year-old "Flawed" boy whom she meets at Highland Castle, where they are both being held pending their trial. At the time of their first encounter, Celestine still believes in the ideology of the Guild, and thinks that, unlike her, Carrick must really deserve being there. However, she soon understands that they are, in fact, in the same situation. Although she does not know him and they do not talk to each other, the fact that he is there and comprehends what she is going through makes Celestine feel less lonely: "I feel as though I'm in a pressure cooker, and he is the only person in it with me who could possibly understand" (Ahern, 2016, p. 101). Excluded from the "perfect" society, Celestine now needs to belong in a different community.

During her stay in the holding cell, Carrick becomes a real role model for Celestine. His unexpected presence in the courtroom, at her trial, gives her strength: "Something about having his eyes on me makes me feel stronger" (Ahern, 2016, p. 128). Before the branding scene, Carrick shows his support for Celestine once more and, just as she is about to enter the room, he makes her a promise: "I'll find you" (p. 146). This is the first time he says anything to her and his words have an empowering effect on Celestine. The fact that he suddenly appears in the empty viewing room (after her family had left), his eyes filled with tears, only adds to the intensity of the connection between the two of them. This connection will follow the protagonist throughout the novel: every time she faces another challenge and needs to deal with her new life as a *Flawed*, she thinks of him.

Though he has such a strong impact on Celestine, becoming her only friend (Ahern, 2016, p. 158), Carrick's presence in the novel is rather subtle and mysterious. He is introduced as a strong, rebellious boy, able to inspire confidence and courage, but, after the branding scene, Celestine loses all contact with him. However, when she realises that Ms. Dockery knows Carrick, she uses her in order to gather information about him. This is how she finds out that Carrick is "F.A.B." – "Flawed At Birth" (p. 328). Like David in *Uglies*, Carrick was born "outside" the perfect society, from two "Flawed" parents.

Celestine's next, and last, interaction with Carrick is during a riot that starts in a supermarket, towards the end of the novel. First hit by a police officer, then trampled by other people,

Celestine wakes up in Carrick's arms. "I told you I'd find you" (Ahern, 2016, p. 392), he says, as he is carrying her away from the scene. With this comment, the author could suggest that the protagonist's journey to find herself, which was mediated by her meeting with Carrick, is nearing completion.

Like David for Tally, Carrick is the character that embodies the complete other, and at the same time a role model and a companion. When given the chance to interact with characters who have already constructed and accepted their identity, regardless of society's norms, the protagonists find the way not only to their own selves, but also to accepting communities. Thus, the message the authors transmit to their young readers could be that belonging is achievable, and help is available on the way to self-discovery.

Regardless of whether they are positive or negative examples, all the characters mentioned in this section impact Tally and Celestine. Their parents' advice, the interactions with the authority figures, the information they gain from the educators, as well as their relation with the companions and role models that they encounter on their journeys, all these elements influence the protagonists, leading to change, determination, growth and maturity.

The fact that the novels introduce such diverse secondary characters has several advantages for the readers. First, they can easily identify with the protagonists. For young people, adults represent both role models as well as authority figures. On one hand, as Coleman (2011) explains, "the various adults (parents, teachers, and other mentors) with whom the young person interacts are important as role models and social agents" (p. 59). On the other hand, According to Hintz and Ostry (2003), dystopia can be compared to the teenage years:

> Indeed, dystopia can act as a powerful metaphor for adolescence. In adolescence, authority appears oppressive, and perhaps no one feels more under surveillance than the average teenager. The teenager is on the brink of adulthood: close enough to see its privileges but unable to enjoy them. The comforts of childhood fail to satisfy. The adolescent craves more power and control, and feels the limits on his or her freedom intensely. Denied legal and social power, teenagers in these books often wield awesome mind control. (p. 10)

Therefore, young readers can identify with Tally and Celestine. Even if they are constantly being surveilled by the authorities, or disappointed by their parents, who used to be their role

models, the protagonists find other adult figures (e.g., family members, teachers, their friends' parents) who can offer them guidance and support throughout their journey.

Second, the presence of secondary characters who act as educators or role models can add to the element of optimism, of hope, typical to YA dystopias (Basu et al., 2013, p. 2). No matter how much power the authorities have, no matter how obedient or brainwashed their parents are, the protagonists discover that not all adults are liars, corrupt or ignorant. There are always a few people who know the truth, who possess the necessary information and the will to bring change.

4.1.3 Growing up

By following the protagonists on their journeys to adulthood, the novels resemble a *Bildungsroman*, "a novel that charts an individual's development, showing that people do, in fact, develop and that childhood experiences are the bedrock of this process" (Rudd, 2010, p. 235). This similarity to the *Bildungsroman* is a common trait for YA novels in general (Kealley, 2017, p. 296), as well as for YA dystopias (Basu et al., 2013, p. 6). The protagonists' transition from the condition of innocent, gullible adolescents to that of strong, independent characters is not a personal choice, but rather a necessity. As Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) explain, "the conditions of the dystopian society force protagonists to fall from innocence and achieve maturity as they realize the dystopian realities in which they live" (p. 7). Discussing the role of female characters, Fritz (2014) argues that they "have taken center stage in YA dystopias as girls who resist the forces of their broken and corrupt societies to create their own identities, shape their own destinies, and transform the worlds in which they live" (p. 17). Both Tally and Celestine are great examples of such characters.

Although the novels introduce protagonists with very different self-perceptions, this is not something that comes from within. There are outside judgments that reflect on the way Tally and Celestine see themselves, and their self-perception in the beginning of the novels is slowly being altered through their interactions with other characters and the ethical dilemmas they face. The elements previously discussed in this chapter – identity and relationships – play an essential role in the process of growing-up, and there are several themes entwined in these topics (e.g., self-worth, belonging, agency) that both Westerfeld and Ahern address.

There are some key episodes in the novels which bear witness to this process of self-growth that the two girls experience. Tally learns that she might not be as ugly as she thinks, and that

what defines her as a person is not the way she looks, but her character. Also, she comes to realise that the beauty standards imposed by her society are just a deception, a means of controlling people's thinking. Likewise, Celestine understands that her notion of perfection is nothing but an illusion, that, in reality, nothing about her world is perfect.

Despite the fact that during her entire adolescence she has been told she was "ugly", Tally comes to discover another mentality in the Smoke, when David tells her she is beautiful. To him, beauty means much more than the physical traits of a person, it comes from the inside: "You can see the world clearly, even if you did grow up spoiled (…) That's why you're beautiful, Tally" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 261). This way of thinking is totally new for Tally and, for the first time, she considers the thought that she might, indeed, be pretty in someone else's eyes: "Maybe he really could see past her ugly face. Maybe what was inside her did matter to him more than anything else" (p. 264).

In Celestine's case, the situation is reversed. The confident, "perfect" girl suddenly turns into a disoriented teenager: "I don't even know what the right thing is anymore. Me, who is always so sure. My black and white is now fuzzy and grey" (Ahern, 2016, p. 119). As she looks in the mirror at her body – branded with the horrible symbol – she feels lost: "I hate what I see (…) They have taken away ownership of myself, and they have made me theirs" (p. 181). Moreover, while she is considered a hero by some people, Celestine feels like a failure: "If I was such a hero, that old man would be alive now (…) A man died because an entire bus full of people failed to help him. Do I think I'm a hero? No. I failed" (p. 201).

These scenes show the multi-faceted nature of the world, in general, and of beauty and perfection in particular. Through David's words, Westerfeld turns young readers' focus from physical attractiveness to inner beauty, and helps them understand that beauty is relative and lies in the eye of the beholder. Similarly, Ahern concentrates on the relativity of perfection and the fact that all people are "flawed". In so doing, both authors encourage young people to accept and value themselves.

Belonging is another theme related to identity found in the novels. Both Tally, who wants to be part of a community of "pretties", and Celestine, who was suddenly excluded from the "perfect" society, have a need to belong, in spite of their rebellion against dominant discourse. In *Uglies*, the key scene describing Tally's feelings of not belonging is after her first encounter with Special Circumstances. Coming back to her dorm, she feels left out and does not know who she

is anymore. Before her birthday, though "ugly", she at least had something to look forward to – becoming a "pretty" – but now nothing makes any sense. She is the first sixteen-year-old still living in Uglyville, and she feels as if everybody is talking about her: "Were they laughing at her? (…) Everywhere she went, eyes looked away, but it was the most visible she'd ever felt" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, pp. 109-110).

Similarly, *Flawed* presents several scenes where Celestine feels excluded. For example, her first day of school after the branding is a nightmare: everyone stares as her, as if they do not know her, while her friend, Marlena, declares herself disappointed and makes it clear that she does not want anything to do with her (Ahern, 2016, p. 190). Even her teachers refuse to teach her, and, just like the Parents' Association and the board, they pressure principal Hamilton into suggesting that home-schooling might be the best idea in this case (pp. 186-187). School goes from being "solid", a place where she felt "comfortable", where she had "a great group of friends" and teachers who liked her (p. 181), to becoming a dreadful experience for Celestine. Moreover, though she is seen as a hero by some people, she cannot identify with the "poster-girl" either: "I don't want to stand out. I want to fit in. I don't want to be a poster girl for anything" (p. 111). Her rejection of another form of branding (i.e., being "poster-girl" for a movement) speaks about the same need for belonging and acceptance. It is an attempt to be invisible, or at least to have the right to choose when to shine and when to be left alone. The message could be that society does not always respect this right, and that there are inherent conflicts that emerge within an invasive society.

The episodes mentioned above are representative for the idea of "the outcast, the loner, the outsider", which is a common trope in young adult literature, and "one that many adolescents identify with" (Garcia, 2013, p. 59). The fact that both authors address this topic could have a positive impact on young readers. As they read the novels and find themselves in Tally and Celestine, teenagers can also learn to overcome similar challenges as those presented in the texts.

Therefore, the topic of agency, as the ability of making choices and taking action, is also essential in the process of growing up. From the very beginning, even before they find out the truth about their societies, Tally and Celestine face some difficult choices. For instance, Tally has made a promise to each of her friends, Peris and Shay, and keeping the promise made to one of them, would mean to betray the other one (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, pp. 121-122). Similarly, Celestine needs to decide whether or not to tell the truth in court: "To not be deemed

Flawed, I must betray the old man on the bus. To be true to myself, I will be deemed Flawed" (Ahern, 2016, p. 118). After these ethical dilemmas they need to solve, both girls have more and more difficult decisions to make along the way. This situation can be related to real life, offering young readers a lesson about how something that at one point seems like the end of the world will often become insignificant, compared to new struggles.

For instance, during her stay in the Smoke, Tally is often consumed by guilt. She finally feels like she belongs, but she knows that she will soon need to activate the tracking device hidden in the pendant she is wearing around her neck. The longer she waits, the guiltier she feels. Moreover, she knows that Shay has a crush on David, but she soon realises that he is actually paying more attention to her than to Shay. As they become closer, Tally feels like she is, once again, betraying her friend. Similarly, after her branding, Celestine is under a lot of pressure. She feels responsible for disrupting the perfect life her family used to live and for putting all of them at risk.

The decisions Tally and Celestine make towards the end of the novels require a lot of courage, and they mark the change that has taken place in the protagonists. After the kiss between David and Tally, when asked about the pendant (which everyone thought was from a boy in the city), Tally decides to destroy it and throws it in the fire. However, this act of loyalty has the opposite effect than she expected: before the pendant gets destroyed, the tracking device is activated. The next morning, Special Circumstances invade the Smoke, taking most of the runaways back to the cities. Both David and Tally manage to escape. Once she finds out that Shay has been turned into a "pretty", against her will, and that David's mother has a potential cure that could reverse the side effects of the surgery, Tally devises a plan which could save her friend. However, this plan requires her to go back in the city and have the surgery herself, with the risk that the cure would not work. She decides that the only way to save her friend is to turn herself in.

Celestine, in her turn, is forced to leave her family and start on an unknown journey. After the riot in the supermarket, when Carrick saves her, she wakes up in her bed. Her sister gives her a note from Carrick: "Don't lose it, Celestine. He wanted to help you. He knows people who can help you. Find him, okay? Promise me you'll find him. Then I know you'll be okay" (Ahern, 2016, pp. 395-396). Being told that Judge Crevan is in their house, blaming her for the riot, and requesting to take her with him, Celestine understands that she has no choice but to run away.

It is her turn to find Carrick. She knows now that together they can bring down Crevan and the Guild.

Thus, by the end of the novels, after a long transformative journey, both Tally and Celestine assume their roles as "key agents in the resistance of dystopian governments and the rebuilding of a new world" (Fritz, 2014, p. 17). The innocent, naïve girls that young readers discover in the beginning of the novels have now become mature, independent individuals. They can make their own decision, and they are not afraid of the consequences. Celestine declares: "I am not as gullible as I once was" (Ahern, 2016, p. 329), whereas Tally maintains an attitude of rebellion until the end, when she turns herself in: "Tally smiled. At least she was causing trouble to the end" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 406).

Emphasising Tally's role from a feminist perspective, Fritz (2014) states that Westerfeld connects his "dystopian girl" character to "complicated cultural realities regarding what it means to be an empowered, socio-politically conscious and active girl in the twenty-first century" (p. 18). On a similar note, Paravano (2021) suggests that Celestine gives the badge of shame new connotations, arguing that:

> "F" is no longer a symbol of imperfection: it stands as a reminder of the importance of female agency, of femininity and feminism as well as of the future which lies wide open to Celestine and to a new generation of young women who believe in the ideals of compassion and logic to face the world. (p. 206)

By including themes related to self-worth, belonging, and agency in their novels, Westerfeld and Ahern make it easier for young readers to identify with the protagonists. According to Garcia (2013), probably "part of how youth empathize with these fictitious characters is through recognizing their teenage emotions related to disconnection" (p. 59). Also, Scholes and Ostenson (2013) explain that teenage readers "connect with these protagonists as they feel a similar weight on their shoulders" (p. 3). Further, they explain that one of the reasons why many adolescents like this genre is precisely the way the protagonists are portrayed: as strong, capable and responsible characters (p. 5). Therefore, the common message that Westerfeld and Ahern send to their readership could be that, once they find and accept themselves and dare to think on their own, regardless of standards imposed by a judgemental society, they will also find their place in a community that shares their values. Moreover, constructing their identity will further

lead to a sense of agency, allowing them to make independent choices, according to their own beliefs.

4.2 Ethical issues, society, and governmental control

Once the protagonists reach a level of maturity and understanding that permits them to manifest their agency, they reject society's judgemental invasiveness and defy its rules. Their societies are permeated with issues such as media manipulation, conformity, social division, unjust laws and governmental control. All of these themes are common dystopian tropes (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013, p. 1), employed to explore possible futures. By satirising aspects of contemporary society, through exaggeration, the authors warn their readership. Thus, such novels are excellent tools for teaching young readers responsibility, civic duties, and involvement.

The way Westerfeld introduces themes like those mentioned above can be summarised in three elements: the control exercised over the citizens, the cover-up related to the surgery, and the punishment. The society in *Uglies* seems to have achieved perfect equality for all citizens, through compulsory surgery. The truth is that this surgery is just a means of controlling the citizens, of avoiding any potential conflicts. Once people have the operation, their brain is also changed: they are transformed into obedient, ignorant individuals. As long as people cannot think for themselves, it is impossible for them to rebel against the status quo. This brainwashing, however, only affects regular people, while those placed in key positions in society only have the physical transformation that comes with the surgery. Their "brain lesions" are cured. The rebels, those who discover the truth and hide in the wilderness, are punished: hunted down by the authorities, forcibly brought back to the cities, and transformed into "pretties".

In *Flawed*, Ahern (2016) presents a society that, against the background of past mistakes, has taken measures to eliminate any ethical errors among citizens, aspiring to achieve moral perfection:

> After our country slid into great economic turmoil because of what was believed to be the bad decisions of our leaders, the Guild's main aim at its origin was to remove Flawed people from leadership roles. It now manages to oust people before they even get into those roles so damage can't be done. In the near future, the Guild boasts, we will have a morally, ethically flawless society. (p. 6)

The original purpose of the Guild seems to be in the interest of the entire society, and the whole process required before deciding whether a person is "Flawed" or not is described as quite transparent. However, there are some ethical issues that arise concerning not only the laws of the Guild or the trial practices but, more importantly, the way people are treated, once deemed "Flawed".

For example, in the beginning of the book, Celestine explains how the court is "open to the public", how everyone can watch the trials on TV, and how "fair" the process is, since "in addition to witnesses of the event in question, friends and family are called to testify on the accused's character" (Ahern, 2016, p. 5). Nonetheless, she is also the one who admits that everyone "who goes through the Flawed court is found guilty; otherwise, they wouldn't be taken in the first place" (p. 23). This indicates that the entire process is just for show: when people are first suspected of being "Flawed", their fate is sealed.

Moreover, once faced with the situation where she is the accused, Celestine realises that Judge Crevan, the most powerful man in the Guild and in the entire country, can bend the truth as he pleases. He repeatedly pushes her to lie in court, aware of the fact that, because of Celestine's relationship with his son, her actions reflect poorly on him. Even after she decides to tell the truth, he still tries to convince her: "Would you recant, Celestine? (…) We can still swing this. It will be difficult, but Pia can do it. A reality show. She can follow you around, show the country how perfect you are" (Ahern, 2016, p. 135). His words suggest that, regardless of the truth, the media can be used to picture things the way he likes, including transforming Celestine into a "poster girl" for the Guild's cause. For young readers, this could be not only a comment on the power of the media, which can spin a story to advance an agenda, but also a warning to be alert and critically evaluate different sources.

In the novel, the protagonist gradually discovers that Crevan has absolute control over what is being made public. In a conversation with Celestine, Pia Wang, the correspondent for the Guild, explains: "It's not easy being a journalist (…) Not everything we write is published the way we want it to be. We don't always have control over our voice" (Ahern, 2016, p. 252). Moreover, as she finds out the truth about Crevan, Pia takes a new, secret identity, under the pseudonym Lisa Life, so she can freely write online what she is not allowed to publish in the newspaper.

Furthermore, Celestine comes to understand that "Crevan is using the Guild as his own private court" (Ahern, 2016, p. 300), as in the case of Dr. Blake, who misdiagnosed his wife. After

losing her to cancer, as a revenge, Crevan found an excuse to deem Dr. Blake "Flawed". Other examples of how broken the system really is are the cases of Angelina Tinder, Celestine's neighbour, and Jimmy Child, a football star. Angelina's sick mother has requested euthanasia, but this practice is considered against the Guild's laws. Despite travelling to a different country to fulfil her mother's wish without risking any consequences, Angelina is still deemed "Flawed". On the other hand, Jimmy Child is accused of being "Flawed" for cheating on his wife. However, during his trial, all the focus is placed on the spouse: "every day it wasn't about him or about what he'd done, but about how she was so annoying and so fake and such a *woman*, how could he not cheat?" (Ahern, 2016, p. 42). Also, in his case, the Naming Day, when the judges announce their verdict, was kept a secret. Instead of a public, televised event, Pia Wang lets the world know that Jimmy Child was found "*not* Flawed" (p. 38). This is the first time the Guild deems a person "*not* Flawed". Later on, it is revealed that Crevan's judgement in both these cases was not impartial, but influenced by personal and economic interests. Abusing his power as the head judge of the Guild, and having the necessary means to hurt the people who dare to stand against him, Crevan inspires fear for everyone around him. It is this fear that keeps people in line.

According to Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013), conformity is one of the major themes in YA dystopian literature, and it is "often exaggerated for dramatic effect" (p. 3). In Celestine's society, where the tiniest moral mistake is harshly punished, conformity is achieved through social pressure. The fear of being deemed "Flawed", of becoming an outcast, has taken over every aspect of people's lives, destroying their relationships, breaking families apart and suppressing their humanity, their compassion for others. Becoming "Flawed" does not only affect the person in question, but their entire family and social circle as well. Aiding a "Flawed" person is, in fact, against the rules. For instance, after Celestine's branding, her little brother, Ewan, is afraid to even look at her, and refuses to pass her the salt during dinner, scared that this gesture might be interpreted as helping her. Also, Celestine herself has experienced these contradictory feelings in the past.

The way "Flawed" people are treated in the novel reveals several key themes, from ethical issues (division and discrimination) to governmental control, exercised through unjust laws, strict rules, and constant surveillance. Many of the examples Ahern employs draw on historical aspects of racial segregation, such as apartheid in South Africa, the Jim Crow laws in the United States, and antisemitism in Nazi Germany. In so doing, she demonstrates to young readers how

society exercises control. These images, common symbols of oppression, evoke past events with strong impact on the social conscience.

Once deemed "Flawed", people are seen as worthless, as a threat to society: "They still live among us, only ostracised, and under separate rules" (Ahern, 2016, p. 6). For instance, they are subject to "job restrictions, curfews, travel restrictions" (p. 46). Even what they are allowed to eat is dictated by the Guild: except for "one luxury a week", they must adopt a basic diet (p. 162). Also, they are not allowed to socialise with more than one other "Flawed" person at a time. This is why there are only two seats for them on each bus (p. 47). Another law against "Flawed" people makes it impossible for them to be parents: "Flawed At Birth children" "have been taken from their parents from birth, never allowed to see them or hear from them again" (p. 332). Moreover, "Flawed" people cannot adopt, not even "Flawed" children, while "Flawed At Birth" are not allowed to go looking for their parents once they are released. These situations would defeat the whole purpose of locking them up "in an institution for eighteen years to 'teach' the Flawed out of them" (p. 330).

Since their moral mistakes are not criminal acts, "Flawed" people are not imprisoned. However, their lives after the verdict and the branding are worse than prison itself, as Celestine explains: "criminals get better treatment than us. As soon as they've served their time, they're out. We're like this forever" (Ahern, 2016, p. 370). Moreover, Angelina Tinder declares that she would choose death over this way of living (p. 165). The consequences of one mistake, which is not even illegal, follow these people for the rest of their lives (p. 61) and even beyond death: "Flawed aren't allowed to be buried with their families; there's a graveyard especially for them" (p. 235).

Ahern addresses two levels of control in her novel: one exercised over the discriminated-against group in society, "Flawed" people, and another exercised through them, on the rest of the citizens. Every "Flawed" is appointed a Whistleblower, whose job is to make sure that they follow all these rules (Ahern, 2016, p. 163). Their every move is controlled and checked at the end of the day: they must be home before curfew, their food intake is measured, and they are even subjected to a lie detector test (p. 164). Moreover, the Guild uses "Flawed" people as a means to set an example. For instance, their families are forced to watch the horrifying branding process. Moreover, "Flawed" people "have to wear an armband on their sleeve with the red letter *F* at all times so they can be identified by the public" (p. 5). This powerful image echoes

not only the Jewish badge during the Holocaust, but also the scarlet letter that Hawthorne's protagonist, Hester Prynne, must wear for the rest of her life.

The presence of the themes discussed here could have an educational impact on young readers, as YA dystopian literature revolves around what Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) call "two contrasting poles: education and escape" (p. 5). While they read these novels as a way to disconnect from their everyday lives, young readers learn about important contemporary issues. Similarly, Gadowski (2014) argues that "YA fiction creates a fertile ground for reflection on various aspects of life crucial for its young audience in the process of their own search for autonomy, authenticity and selfhood" (p. 153). Indeed, it is not only the identity of young people that is formed during adolescence, but also their understanding and view of the world, their personal opinions and values. Reading novels such as *Uglies* and *Flawed,* can teach teenagers to reflect on their society and challenge them to "consider the values of each individual to the community, as well as the need to keep society from dismantling individual rights" (Hintz & Ostry, 2003, p. 9). Being critical, questioning the societal habits, as well as considering the ethical issues that are raised once society takes over the individual, are all essential qualities for the young people of the twenty-first century.

4.3 Environmental concerns

The novels also encourage adolescents to consider the importance of personal responsibility and agency in the face of environmental challenges. The threat of environmental destruction constitutes a key element in YA dystopias: "Rising sea levels, storms, drought, and the end of fossil fuels create social, political, and economic nightmares that sensitize readers to the dangers of environmental ruin" (Basu et al., 2013, p. 3). Moreover, as Stableford (2010) explains, dystopias "point out that the enemy was not so much an implacable external force as our own lack of moral restraint" (p. 277). Therefore, in the novels, these threats are described from the perspective of fictitious societies who have already conquered all these challenges, with the purpose of warning the readers.

In the beginning of *Flawed*, we find out that Earth Day plays an important role in Celestine's society. It is an event that people celebrate every year with their families and friends. Celestine grew up with this tradition: "Earth Day celebrations are something Juniper and I have always loved since we were kids, counting down the days on our calendar, planning what we're going to wear, decorating the house and setting the table" (Ahern, 2016, p. 6). This way of preparing

for Earth Day reminds of how some people nowadays celebrate Christmas or New Year's Eve, demonstrating the importance of this day. Also, the mention of "enormous recycling bins" (p. 216) indicates that nothing goes to waste in the "flawless" society.

In *Uglies*, Westerfeld depicts a world in which technology is used to provide everyone with necessary resources, preserving, at the same time, the environment. In Tally's society, people take pride in the solutions they have developed over time, and children are taught about the devastating mistakes of earlier generations: "the teachers always made the Rusties out to be so stupid. You almost couldn't believe people lived like this, burning trees to clear land, burning oil for heat and power, setting the atmosphere on fire with their weapons" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 60). The people who live in the cities have found a balance that allows them to protect whatever could be saved after the "Rusties" (people of our time) destroyed the world, without feeling that they lack anything: "We exist in equilibrium with our environment, Tally, purifying water that we put back in the river, recycling the biomass, and using only power drawn from our own solar footprint" (p. 103).

Ostry (2013) distinguishes between "technological" and "ecological" utopia, and argues that, in *Uglies*, Westerfeld includes both, with the purpose of challenging adolescent readers. She explains that "technological utopia echoes youth culture with its love for technology, consumption and distraction" (p. 101). Indeed, the description of how children, "littlies" and "uglies", spend their time, dreaming of how they would look like after the surgery, and using the "morpho software", to create potential images of themselves, is a great example of their interest in technology: "Everyone made morphos, even littlies, too young for their facial structure to have set. It was a great waste of a day, figuring out all the different ways you could look when you finally became pretty" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, pp. 39-40). Similarly, the lifestyle in New Pretty Town is characterised by consumption and leisure, as the "pretties" are partying all the time: "They lived like uglies, a hundred or so together in a big dorm. But this dorm didn't have any rules. Unless the rules were Act Stupid, Have Fun, and Make Noise" (p. 12).

On the other hand, while the city authorities emphasise the good life that they offer, and teach their children about how the actions of previous generations have nearly destroyed the planet, people in the cities are "coddled", spending "their whole life in a bubble" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 247), totally disconnected from nature. This life they have built away from nature, based on technology, has its drawbacks. Zipes (2003) argues that:

> Much of what we cite as progress, especially technological progress, has a double edge to it. The cloning of vegetables, animals, and humans that may help overcome hunger and disease may eventually lead to the mechanization of the natural and human world as we know it. The advances in communication may lead to dis-communication and alienation. One could argue that the great drive of human beings to establish fairer, more socialist societies has led to perverted societies, what we might call negative utopias. (p. xi)

This is exactly what has happened in the society depicted in *Uglies*. Tally was taught that living in nature is "wrong", "unless you want to live like an animal" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 89). Also, from her description of how the "Rusties" used to live three hundred years in the past, the reader can find out about the work conditions in the futuristic society: the factories are placed underground, and people are working from home, without any social contact with their co-workers (p. 60). Moreover, during her solo journey to the Smoke, Tally discovers nature from a totally new perspective: "That's how things were out here in the wild, she was learning. Dangerous or beautiful. Or both" (p. 146). She also learns about how human technology can destroy nature, how greed had driven a "Rusty" scientist to "mess up with the genes" of the white tiger orchid, transforming "one of the rarest plants in the world" into "the ultimate weed". Three hundred years later, people still fight the "monoculture" that took over the entire land, destroying other species (p. 173).

Contrary to a first positive impression that a lifestyle based on recycling, plant-based diets and technological solutions might have on the reader, people living in the cities lack the "maturity with its emphasis on self-reliance, self-restraint, hard work, decision-making, and community" that ecological utopia promotes (Ostry, 2013, p. 101). However, there are other characters in the book who possess all these qualities, namely the "Smokies", those people who left the urban life to live in the wilderness. There is a clear discrepancy between the runaways and the people living in the cities. When she first finds out about the "Smokies", Tally compares them to the "Rusties": "But how do people live out there, Shay? Like the Rusties? Burning trees for heat and burying their junk everywhere?" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 88). Shay explains that, while they still use some technology, the "Smokies" "don't put a wall up between themselves and nature" (p. 89). During the time she spends with them, Tally can experience this lifestyle in connection with nature. She soon realises that, while they do use a lot of wood, everything is well calculated: there are only certain valleys where they cut down trees, and they are also planting more, in strategic places, to fight the expansion of the white tiger orchid (p. 187).

Similarly, though their diet is not plant-based, as in the cities, they are only hunting those species "that had gotten out of control thanks to the Rusties' meddling" (p. 220). This balanced way of living, "characterized by scarcity rather than abundance," is the perfect example of "an ecological utopia whose inhabitants live in nature harmoniously despite limited resources, and deeply respect nature as valuable in itself" (Ostry, 2013, p. 103).

For Tally, leaving the city was the first step necessary to discover not only the world, but also herself. Life in the Smoke empowers and invigorates her. Besides the fact that she learns a lot about the runaways and, consequently, about her own society, she comes to appreciate nature and even the hard work required for survival in the wilderness:

> Forgetting her troubles was easy in the Smoke. Life was much more intense than in the city. She bathed in a river so cold that she had to jump in screaming, and she ate food pulled from the fire hot enough to burn her tongue, which city food never did. (…) Tally felt stronger than ever before. She could work all day (…) The physical beauty of the Smoke also cleared her mind of worries. (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 219)

These examples from the novel are in accordance with what McDonough and Wagner (2014) say about Tally's awakening being "catalyzed by her experiences within nature", which becomes the "ideal place for claiming her agency" (p. 157). The peace of mind, the physical work, and the beauty of nature she has found in the wilderness are all key elements in the identity formation process of the protagonist.

The environmental concerns that Westerfeld addresses in his novel are presented from two different perspectives. On one hand, the people in the cities condemn not only the "Rusties", but also the "Smokies", who seem to make the same bad decisions as earlier generations. On the other hand, the runaways know that the apparently perfect life in the cities comes with a cost: that regular citizens have no free-will, but are programmed to comply with whatever the authorities decide. Moreover, they believe that it is possible to combine the use of technology with a life in connection with nature, which, contrary to what the authorities claim, they respect and protect. Reflecting on both these attitudes and the messages they convey, comparing the pros and cons of both lifestyles depicted in the novel, can help young readers to think critically and understand that the way contemporary society lives has consequences for future generations.

These examples from the novels show not only that the environmental challenges that the current generation faces can be overcome, but it also hints at different directions the solutions might take. The authors suggest that solving present problems must be achieved while acknowledging future outcomes, thus motivating young readers to carefully consider their decisions and actions.

4.4 Concluding remarks

The literary analysis conducted in this chapter has been focused on how Westerfeld and Ahern address some common themes related to both YA and dystopian literature, and their possible effects on teenage readers in the classroom. In both novels, the topics of identity, relationships, and growing up are part of the protagonists' journeys of becoming.

Two very different girls in the beginning of the novels, both Tally and Celestine are disappointed by their parents and threatened by the authorities. However, their encounters with other characters provide the information and support they need on their way to maturity. During their journeys of formation, like many teenagers, the protagonists experience identity crises, struggle with the feeling of not belonging, and face some difficult choices, especially after they discover the truth about their societies.

Moreover, the errors of their worlds introduce themes linked to ethical issues, society, and governmental control. In Celestine's society, conformity is achieved through fear and media manipulation, while discrimination is encouraged through a series of unjust laws against those who have committed ethical mistakes. In *Uglies*, individualism is eliminated through cosmetic surgery, supposed to bring equality among people. Additionally, Westerfeld sheds light on contemporary environmental issues. The seemingly perfect life in the cities is based on technology, while the runaways, who refuse the surgery, live in the wilderness, in harmony with nature. Both of these lifestyles present advantages and disadvantages and reveal different practices and behaviours.

The themes brought into discussion in this chapter are highly relevant for young readers. At an age where they try to find out who they are, where they face insecurities and difficult choices, where they try to escape parental and adult control, adolescents can not only identify with characters presented in these novels, but they can also learn about social organisation and political participation. Moreover, comparing and contrasting different mentalities regarding the

environmental challenges we face today can lead to better understanding, as well as an increased sense of personal responsibility.

5. Discussion of the didactic benefits of *Uglies* and *Flawed*

The close reading of *Uglies* and *Flawed* from the previous chapter revealed some generic young adult and dystopian tropes that Westerfeld and Ahern address in the novels: identity, relationships, growing up, ethical and social issues, governmental control, and environmental concerns. All these themes, as this chapter will demonstrate, are linked to values on which education in Norway is based, such as *human dignity*, *identity*, *critical thinking and ethical awareness*, and *respect for nature and environmental awareness*. Moreover, many of these themes are also addressed in the studies discussed in the literature review. Concepts of social engagement (Simmons, 2014), critical thinking (Marshall, 2014), consumption (Wilkinson, 2010), and civic responsibility (Ames, 2013), are not only directly relevant to the values and principles included in the revised curriculum, but also central themes in both *Uglies* and *Flawed*.

Thus, this chapter is divided into three sections, corresponding not only to the interdisciplinary topics – *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development* – but also to the three main sections from the literary analysis (1. identity, relationships, and growing up; 2. ethical issues, society, and governmental control; 3. environmental concerns), as discussed in chapter 4. Further, each section will be divided into subsections addressing important elements embedded in the interdisciplinary topics, as well as core values from the curriculum.

5.1 Health and life skills

The purpose of the interdisciplinary topic *health and life skills*, according to the core curriculum, is to provide young people with the necessary skills to make responsible choices and help them live a healthy life, both physically and mentally (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15). Identity represents an essential aspect of this topic. Both the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum emphasise the need of developing a confident identity and a positive self-image (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, a sense of accomplishment contributes to building a secure identity, and this can be achieved if young people learn how to successfully express what they feel and think, as the English subject curriculum points out (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3). Based on these considerations, in order to demonstrate the separate, but interconnected aspects of *health and life skills*, this section is divided into three subsections; the first is focused on physical and

mental health, the second is concerned with the topic of identity, and the third deals with the core value *the joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore.*

5.1.1 Physical and mental health

There are a lot of decisions that young people need to make during their formative years, decisions that can have a positive or negative impact on their physical and mental health. For instance, the lifestyle they choose can affect their physical condition, while their relationships with other people, or the way they see themselves, through the eyes of others, can influence their mental health. Therefore, developing their critical thinking skills is essential for their personal and intellectual growth, as this will help them learn to make good decisions. The examples that Wilkinson (2010) uses when discussing the dangers of a consumerist society are highly relevant here. Although her study is focussed on how the environment is suffering because of the decisions of "the consumer class", she also brings into discussion the negative effects of this contemporary trend on an individual level. She suggests that the uncontrolled need to purchase more and more unnecessary things affects one's mental health just as much as the modern western diet – based on highly processed foods – can lead to poor physical health (p. 22).

While considered a punishment in Celestine's society, the description of the Flawed "basic diet" – which includes grains, seeds and fish – suggests that a simpler diet is healthier than the regular one, the one that allows "luxuries", such as cupcakes: "It's a healthy diet (…) Probably one we should all be eating" (Ahern, 2016, p. 171). A similar episode in *Uglies* presents some differences between the diet of the urban society and what the "smokies" consume in the wilderness. In accordance with the sustainable lifestyle of the city, the plant-based diet that Tally is used to has a positive impact on the environment. However, in the Smoke, Tally soon discovers the richness of taste that characterises the runaways' food: "the strawberries were sweet without sugar, and although it seemed weird to eat it plain, the Smokies' bread had its own flavor without anything added" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 195). This indicates that, by preparing food from things they have grown themselves, the rebels live a much healthier life than people in the cities. Moreover, the fact that they need to work hard to produce their food keeps them physically active, which also constitutes a health benefit.

One could, of course, imagine that a highly developed society, as the one in *Uglies*, has found ways to eradicate all of the lifestyle diseases that contemporary society struggles with.

However, there is no such mention in the novel, and the readers' generation still faces these challenges. Therefore, the examples mentioned here can be used to discuss different lifestyles and dietary habits, motivating students to reflect on their own lives and the decisions they are making every day. Moreover, in lower secondary school this topic could be addressed in projects involving other subjects, such as "food and health".

The novels also include examples that could be used to address the topic of mental health. *Uglies,* for instance, includes a reference to eating disorders. During a visit at the library, in the Smoke, Tally and Shay look through some old magazines, depicting models from the reader's generation. Shocked at how skinny one of the models was, Tally remembers what she was taught in school:

> Back in the days before the operation (…) a lot of people, especially young girls became so ashamed at being fat that they stopped eating. They'd lose weight too quickly, and some would get stuck and would keep losing weight until they would wound up like this "model". Some even died, they said at school. That was one of the reasons they'd come up with the operation. No one got the disease anymore, since everybody knew at sixteen they'd turn beautiful. In fact, most people pigged out just before they turned, knowing it would all be sucked away. (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 190)

This episode from the novel can be used to address both the topic of eating disorders, as well as the ethical implications of the surgery. The argument that one of the reasons behind the surgery was to eliminate certain illnesses is a controversial one, and it could open up fruitful discussions with the students, especially about critical thinking and ethical awareness in decision making.

Furthermore, themes such as self-worth or belonging, discussed in the literary analysis, can help young readers to better understand the influence that other people can have on them, and make wise decisions in their relationships. While they need to have a sense of belonging to a group, it is essential that adolescents understand the concept of mutual respect in their relationships, and learn how to set boundaries but also respect others' boundaries (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 16). For instance, the scenes in *Flawed,* where Celestine is excluded and even bullied by other students (Ahern, 2016, pp. 190, 274), can be used to open up discussions about how we treat other people, as well as how we deal with feelings of rejection and loneliness.

5.1.2 Identity

Identity construction is a complex process and plays an essential part in the individual's development, particularly during adolescence. In the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum, the formation of a "confident" or "secure" identity is linked to the interdisciplinary topic *health and life skills* (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 15; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3), suggesting that the way young people's identity is shaped during these crucial years can, in the long run, impact their health.

Identity is also one of the typical themes addressed in YA dystopian literature. Referring to the effects of the genre on young readers, Basu (2013) explains that:

> Whatever else they may do, all heroes of young adult fiction – and by extension their readers – are eventually asked to consider the two great questions of adolescence: "Who am I now? And how do I want to be when I grow up?" As they do so, they inevitably embark upon a quest for identity, an apparently innocuous pursuit that lies at the very core of the genre. (p. 19)

Thus, as they read novels such as *Uglies* and *Flawed* and identify with Tally and Celestine, young people can start to reflect on their own lives and ask essential questions. In my literary analysis in chapter 4, I compared the two novels to a *Bildungsroman*. This "quest for identity" constitutes the link between YA dystopias and the traditional coming-of-age novel. Analysing the development of the protagonists in the novels, their transformation from naïve, submissive teenagers into strong, independent people, can encourage students to discover their own potential, and motivate them to express themselves and fight for their beliefs.

Although taken to the extreme, the ideologies presented in both novels are inspired by real issues in contemporary society, issues that can have a negative impact on the individual: an increased, almost obsessive focus on physical appearance, and the haste of judging other people for their actions, especially when they are not compatible with our own values. Examining the effect of overemphasising physical beauty in *Uglies*, Moran (2014) explains that "a perceived lack of personal beauty" often leads to unhappiness, especially in women, in our society. She also refers to the negative effects that this can have on one's identity and mental health, arguing that "many feminist scholars have analyzed how patriarchal standards of feminine appearance have affected women's psyches, relationships and life choices" (p. 125). Similarly, Donnelly (2019) discusses how this ideology affects both girls and boys in Tally's society, as they are

"indoctrinated into acceptance of the notion that physical attractiveness is the most important aspect of their identity" (p. 60). In search of their identity, and obsessed with the idea that they are ugly, that they need the surgery in order to be able to live a happy life, and find out who they are, the teenagers in the novel fail to realise that their personal identity is in fact suppressed, precisely through the surgery they have been waiting for. The negative effects of the ideology on the individual can be extrapolated to *Flawed* and the flawless morality that is required from the people in Celestine's society. The pressure of always making the "right" choice, of never saying or doing anything that might be interpreted as wrong, of being nothing less than perfect, can have the same psychological effects as being overly concerned with a standardised physical appearance.

Both of these issues – absolute beauty and moral perfection – are highly relevant for young adults in modern society. On one hand, there is a preponderance of preoccupation with looks among adolescents, and the fact that they are surrounded by unrealistic standards of beauty makes things even more difficult for them (Jiotsa et al., 2021). On the other hand, being on the brink of adulthood and knowing society's expectations, on top of one's own desires and ambitions, can be overwhelming. There is a lot of pressure that comes with all the decisions that adult life requires, and accepting that morality does not equal perfection can be the key to finding personal satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to address these issues in the educational context, and YA dystopias such as *Uglies* and *Flawed* can provide suitable discussion material.

5.1.3 The joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore

The key value *the joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore*, from the core curriculum, is focused on how curiosity and creativity can lead to the development of problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to express oneself. The document encourages letting students ask questions, examine and experiment, with the purpose of developing these skills. The relevance of this core value for the interdisciplinary topic *health and life skills* lies particularly in the importance that the abilities to express feelings, thoughts, experiences and opinions play in constructing a confident identity, as explained in the English subject curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020, p. 3).

In contrast with this perspective from the curricula documents, the school system depicted in *Uglies* is based on propaganda. Therefore, teachers could use concrete examples from the novel with the students, encouraging them to reflect on their own school experience. For example,

they could compare Tally's limited life in the city with the openness of the wilderness and the opportunities for learning, exploring and experimenting that she finds in nature. This could be planned as a cross-curricular project, in collaboration with natural sciences teachers. Furthermore, doing this outside might be even more productive than in a traditional school setting. The experience of the last couple of years has shown how important it is not to limit the teaching situations to a physical classroom. During the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers were advised to move their classrooms outdoors, as much as possible. Thus, knowing how to use nature as an arena for teaching is essential, especially in situations where one needs to find creative solutions to existing problems.

Moreover, teachers could use the novels as inspiration for developing both written and oral tasks that promote creativity, encouraging students to express their thoughts and opinions. A possible written task would be to consider some of the issues in contemporary society, imagine the world after several hundred years, and write dystopian short stories, either individually or in groups. The oral tasks could be planned in the form of debates, which can allow students to practice not only their oral skills, but critical thinking as well. Focusing on controversial topics from the novels, such as the suppression of individualism in *Uglies*, or the media manipulation in *Flawed*, teachers could ask students to analyse these ideas from a democratic perspective.

5.2 Democracy and citizenship

The topic of democracy plays an essential role in the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum, and one of the major concerns of the documents is that school should be an arena where students not only learn but also practice democratic values, such as mutual respect, tolerance and individual freedom. This will prepare them for assuming their roles as active, responsible members of society. According to Ames (2013), YA dystopian novels have great educational potential, as they "provide social commentary that is relevant to society today" (p. 4). She argues that this genre can be used especially to teach political issues, and that reading this kind of literature "may be a small step in the direction of engaging students in social justice issues and, perhaps, sparking more overt political action" (p. 4).

As both *Uglies* and *Flawed* include political topics like governmental control, conformity and discrimination, they can be used in the English classes to address these themes and engage students in relevant discussions. For instance, pupils could be asked to analyse how the authorities in the two novels use propaganda and media manipulation to suppress individualism

and exert control over the citizens. Similarly, they could explore the ethical issues that arise in the way *Flawed* people are treated, or in how the surgery is being forced on citizens, and how it damages their brains, changing their personalities and thinking. They could also discuss the importance of personal responsibility and participation, by analysing different characters in the novels, especially the protagonists.

Considering the themes mentioned above and their interconnection with the curriculum, this section is divided into three subsections, addressing some of the core values inherent in democracy and citizenship: *human dignity*, *cultural diversity*, *critical thinking and ethical awareness*, and *democracy and participation*.

5.2.1 Human dignity and cultural diversity

The core value *human dignity* is essential in a democratic society, since it refers to the fact that all people are equal. Regardless of our differences, we all have the same rights and deserve to be treated with respect (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 6). Moreover, emphasising the importance of *cultural diversity*, the core curriculum states that students should develop in an "inclusive and diverse environment", where they can connect with people who have "different perspectives, attitudes and views of life" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 7). The societies depicted by Westerfeld and Ahern offer perfect opportunities for analysing this topic, as in both cases individualism is suppressed in favour of a homogenous mass of submissive people.

In *Uglies*, the authorities try to eliminate any differences between the individuals, and use the concept of equality as a pretext to convince people that having the surgery is a positive thing. However, the hidden element of this operation, the "brain lesions" uncover the real intention behind the leaders' decisions: to gain full control over the citizens. Moreover, talking about the time before the surgery, Tally refers to racism, stating that: "people killed one another over stuff like having different skin color" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 43). This episode indicates that even racial differences have been eliminated in Tally's society.

In *Flawed*, though *the Guild*'s aim is to achieve a morally flawless society, in which humanity should be an imperative, its leaders' moral absolutism is defined by inhumanity. Those who have committed the tiniest ethical mistake, after society's standards, cease to be treated as humans. The strict rules that all *Flawed* people must follow, as punishment, are humiliating and degrading. Moreover, by instigating fear among citizens, the authorities force everyone else to adopt the same attitude of rejection and exclusion. The ultimate example of how the "flawless

society" has failed to achieve its highest purpose is the fact that Celestine, who was driven by compassion for the old man on the bus, is found *Flawed*.

Regarding the topic of racial diversity, there is a fundamental difference between the two novels. While Westerfeld's protagonist is a "a figure of normative whiteness" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 78), like in most YA novels, which "do not overtly discuss or negotiate race" (Paravano, 2021, p. 204), Ahern introduces a mixed-race protagonist. However, she does not emphasise Celestine's ethnic background, "because this has no effects on her personality or her choices" (Paravano, 2021, p. 204). This could suggest that in Celestine's society racial discrimination is no longer a problem.

The above mentioned episodes from the books could be examined in a teaching situation in interdisciplinary projects with other subjects, such as social sciences or history, to help students reflect on the ideologies presented in the novels. They can examine the moral implications of how authoritarian societies take away citizens' individual independent judgment and force them to go against their personal moral code. Further, they could discuss not only the examples of discrimination from the novels, but the themes of respect and equality in the contemporary context as well, since the core curriculum emphasises the need of protecting and reinforcing such values. (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 6). Moreover, although the issue of racial diversity is only evasively addressed in the novels, the fact that the authors introduce so disparate perspectives can open up discussions on the topic of racial equality.

Additionally, a more practical approach could be the one proposed by Simmons (2014), who uses YA dystopias to develop her students' critical literacy and encourage social action. Reading the novels with a critical eye, analysing the social issues addressed by Westerfeld and Ahern, such as civil rights and discrimination, can help students understand that their society, although a democracy, is not a perfect one. This can further motivate them to raise awareness about these topics and become active participants in different social projects.

5.2.2 Critical thinking and ethical awareness

By addressing typical political themes, as well as ethical issues, both *Uglies* and *Flawed* offer the possibility of developing students' critical literacy, encouraging critical thinking and ethical awareness. Two of the skills related to critical thinking that the core curriculum highlights – the abilities to "ask questions" and to "assess different sources of knowledge" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 8) – are also key elements of critical literacy, as defined by

Darder, Baltodano and Torres, cited in Simmons (2014, p. 81). According to them, through the texts employed, teachers can guide their students and enable them to understand their own development in relation to the world, by examining ideas and uncovering ideologies and discourses of power. On a similar note, referring to the educational value of YA dystopian novels, Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) argue that "their wildly fantastic premises may provide young people with an entry point into real-world problems, encouraging them to think about social and political issues in new ways, or even for the first time" (pp. 4-5). Following the protagonists' coming-of-age journeys, young readers can gradually discover the totalitarian regimes and the ideologies depicted in the books and, just like Tally and Celestine, they need to think for themselves, reflect on the situations presented in the novels, and compare these with real-life situations in contemporary society.

Furthermore, the core curriculum points out the ability to deal with conflicts and disagreements in challenging situations as an essential democratic skill (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 16). Therefore, the way the authorities in the two novels rule society and deal with potential conflicts, could be used to discuss authoritarian political systems and compare them to democratic ones. A relevant example here is Tally's comparison of the parties in Uglyville, before the surgery, and those in New Pretty Town: "Of course, everyone was always laughing here. Unlike an ugly party, there'd never been any fights, or even arguments" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, pp. 12-13). The lack of fights and arguments among the "pretties" is a direct consequence of the surgery, used as means of control. The leaders in Tally's society are avoiding disagreements and forms of rebellion by depriving citizens of their freedom of thought and expression. Thus, such details from the literary texts can help students recognise the important role that debate and discussion have in the democratic process.

Other examples can be employed to teach about the dangers of propaganda and censorship, as in both novels, people have limited access to information. In *Uglies* the school system is based on propaganda, while in *Flawed* all media are strictly controlled. Also, in the face of a conflict, the leaders abuse their authority and resort to violence: they silence and punish those who know the truth and dare rise against the status quo. Thus, being the opposite of a democratic society, the fictional worlds depicted in the novels could be used for analysis and reflection, in order to teach students the value of comparing various sources of information and encouraging them to think critically.

Additionally, the ethical dilemmas that Tally and Celestine encounter on their journeys are relevant for adolescents today and can be used in a teaching situation. Marshall (2014) explains that the readers might deal with some of the same challenges as the characters in dystopias, and states that "if we are lucky, we are able to take more from fiction than the pleasures that entertainment provides: we make connections; embrace other points of view; and potentially grow our capacity to empathize with others" (pp. 144-145). According to the core curriculum, ethical awareness "means balancing different considerations" and is "necessary if one is to be a reflecting and responsible human being" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 8). Consequently, examining those scenes from the novels addressing topics such as loyalty, betrayal, compassion and trustworthiness, when the protagonists need to make difficult, almost impossible choices, could be a great way to improve students' ethical awareness.

Moreover, people's conformity and lack of agency in the novels are perfect examples of why one needs to think independently. Analysing this topic in *Uglies*, Rodríguez (2016) argues that "Westerfeld considers the shallowness of future culture an essential element in a dystopian novel, so as to add the general warning to the reader about the danger of not cultivating the mind" (p. 72). Similarly, Marshall (2014) suggests that dystopias show "the ways our current society might be actively considered (and reconsidered) to the extent that readers might be motivated to do all they can in order to prevent such developments from happening in our actual worlds" (p. 145). The fictitious scenarios from the novels are extreme examples of what could happen once individuals stop questioning what is imposed as the norm and let themselves be manipulated, leaving all power in the hands of few. Therefore, the message of the novels for young readers could be that, as members of society, they have a choice: they need to ask questions, analyse the information, and act responsibly, making their own decisions.

5.2.3 Democracy and participation

Many of the examples from the novels mentioned above – controlled societies, prejudicial treatment of the citizens, propaganda – emphasise the idea from the core curriculum that "democracy cannot be taken for granted", as well as why it must be "developed and maintained" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 16). Therefore, students should be taught the importance of personal responsibility and agency in the democratic process. Some of the values they should learn and understand are mutual respect, tolerance, individual freedom and free elections. The absence of these values in the societies depicted in both novels can lead to purposeful discussions in a classroom setting.

The first two values, mutual respect and tolerance refer to how we relate to other people, especially when we do not share the same perspectives or beliefs. When working with the novels, these values can be addressed in regard to human dignity. In this context, the relation between the authorities and the resistance groups in both novels is highly important. The core curriculum discusses the importance of collaboration, dialogue and disagreement (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 10), whereas in the authoritarian societies depicted in the novels none of these are possible: no individual is allowed to question the decisions of the leaders.

This lack of room for dialogue and disagreement is connected to the suppression of the other two essential democratic values: individual freedom and free elections. In *Uglies*, the conversations between Tally and Shay reveal the extent of the societal control in the cities. Contrasting the restricted urban life with the freedom that living in the Smoke offers, Shay argues: "It's not like here, Tally. They don't separate everyone, uglies from pretties, new and middle and late. And you can leave whenever you want, go anywhere you want" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 86). Moreover, people's freedom of thought and decision is taken away through the compulsory surgery that changes their brains. The descriptions of the "new pretties", who "were always having too much fun to notice little things out of place" (p. 5), who never kept their promises to go back to Uglyville and visit their friends, suggest that, once they have the surgery, they are completely changed, unable to think for themselves or question anything that happens in society. This could be a metaphor for shallowness leading to an unquestioning and politically unengaged society.

In *Flawed*, the lack of individual freedom affects mainly "Flawed" people, as they are the ones who must follow the unjust laws. However, the freedom of their families and friends is implicitly constrained. As soon as someone in their social circle is declared "Flawed", people are forced to go against their conscience, carefully considering their every move, to make sure that they are not "aiding a Flawed". Additionally, although there are mentions of elections and political parties, there are two key elements that negatively influence the democratic process: the media manipulation and the strict control that the Guild exercises. The citizens are only provided with the information allowed by the authorities. Consequently, even if people are allowed to vote, their decisions are never independent, but rather dictated by the leaders. What is more, the Guild has full control over the potential candidates, disrupting the democracy. While the original aim of the Guild was to make sure that "Flawed" people cannot attain leadership roles, Crevan himself abuses his power as head judge. Therefore, the fact that anyone

can be deemed “Flawed” by him implies that the decisions about who gets a chance to run for a political position also lies in his hands. These details from the novel indicate that, although they exist, the elections are neither free nor fair.

Such examples from the novels can be used to discuss the concept of democracy in modern society. Analysing the dystopian worlds depicted in the novels and reflecting on the civil rights and liberties that democracy promotes can help students understand the importance of the democratic values. As Ames (2013) explains, analysing “the socio-political commentary present within this popular body of literature provides insights into the concerns this generation may have for the future” (p. 4). Discussing the idea of freedom and all its facets, the relation between individual rights and respect for others, as well as the situations that might occur once these basic democratic values are violated, can motivate adolescents and help them become responsible, active members of society.

The individual duty of participation is in fact another essential aspect related to democracy, and it can be addressed, in a teaching situation, by examining the notion of agency as presented in the two novels. The literary analysis in chapter 4 has shown that the way Tally and Celestine are portrayed can help young readers to identify with these characters. The protagonists are meant as an inspiration for adolescents. They start off as typical teenagers, with all the challenges that this transitional stage between childhood and adulthood involves, but, during their coming-of-age journeys, they become examples of strength, courage and determination. Discussing the development of such characters, Marshall (2014) argues that:

> The heroes and heroines of the contemporary YA novel are no longer content to remain fixed in the societal spaces that defined adolescent characters in the past, and they often engage with their worlds in positions that are often more defiant than submissive. (p. 140)

This does not mean that the authors instigate rebellion, encouraging young readers to defy the adult figures in their lives but, as Hintz and Ostry (2003) explain, through “utopian and dystopian writing, children learn about social organization”, as this genre “encourages young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing or predisposing them to political action” (p. 7). Thus, through satires of modern western society, Westerfeld and Ahern aim to guide their readership, to help young people understand social and political structures, think critically and independently, and be able to make their own decisions.

Therefore, reading the novels can prove to be an "awakening" moment for some teenagers, similar to what happens to the protagonists of the novels once they begin uncovering the truth about their societies. Moran (2014) refers to a "causal relationship between a protagonist's awakening and agency" arguing that:

> The process of awakening occurs through each protagonist's awareness of the world and herself that, although perhaps still mediated through cultural and social imperatives, is altered through the realization that she must be responsible for the changes she wishes to see in herself and her world. Recognizing the need for these changes eventually leads her to act. (p. 158)

Similarly, in order for young readers to assume their roles as participants in the political processes of their own society, they first need to understand democracy and the values on which it is based, and also be made aware of the fact that every citizen has a personal responsibility to protect them.

5.3 Sustainable development

One of the key values from the core curriculum – *respect for nature and environmental awareness* – suggests that an important step towards achieving sustainable development is involving the young generation in the efforts for constructing a better future. Students should learn about the environmental challenges that threaten life on Earth and understand how our present actions can affect the next generations. YA dystopian literature is a suitable genre for addressing environmental issues in the English classes. According to Basu Broad and Hintz (2013), this genre has the power to "sensitize readers to the dangers of environmental ruin", as this topic represents a "major preoccupation of the dystopian imagination" (p. 3). Similarly, Guanio-Uluru (2019) explains that:

> Literary texts are useful points of departure for raising environmental awareness because literature presents the reader with constructed environments and actions, and in children's and young adult literature, these environments are specifically shaped in order to socialise children and young adults into ways of being and behaving. (p. 6)

Therefore, certain episodes and details from the novels can be used to facilitate classroom discussions about the current situation, the real dangers that our generation faces, as well as possible solutions. For instance, the annual celebration of Earth Day in *Flawed* can be compared

to the present. While nowadays some people celebrate this day as a way of raising awareness about climate change and pollution, the descriptions from the novel can offer a glimpse of how the future could look like, suggesting that Celestine's society is past the time when people need to be made conscious of these dangers.

In *Uglies*, such examples are more numerous than in Ahern's novel. By placing the dystopian society in his novel three hundred years in the future, after an ecological disaster, Westerfeld urges young readers to contemplate the present conditions. Moreover, he employs strong language when referring to the readers' generation. Tally finds it difficult "to think of the Rusties as actual people, rather than as just an idiotic, dangerous, and sometimes comic force of history" (Westerfeld, 2005/2011, p. 330), considering that they "have been insane, almost destroying the world in a million different ways" (p. 191). The wording here is the author's way of reinforcing the idea that we must consider the future consequences of our actions. Moreover, it is also showing that judgment is context-specific – what at this point in time is still debatable, might retrospectively seem obvious.

Ostry's (2013) definitions of "technological" and "ecological" utopia, discussed in the literary analysis, are relevant here. Examples from the novel (the consumerist culture in New Pretty Town, the positive versus negative effects of technology, life in the wilderness and the connection with nature) can be used to open up a discussion about the different ways of living in modern western societies and the potential dangers that these lifestyles might pose to the environment. Also, using discussion starters can encourage students to reflect on their own habits that might affect the environment. Wilkinson (2010) proposes questions such as: "What have you bought this week? Why? Do you need these things?", "Do you own any clothes, electronics, etc. that you rarely or never use? Why?" (p. 25).

McDonough and Wagner (2014) argue that in "the twenty-first century the conviction that nature is necessary and good has sparked the 'green' movement as well as the desire to return to nature" (p. 158). This statement is in accordance with the need, emphasised in the core curriculum, for developing students' respect for nature as a source of "utility, joy, health and learning" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019, p. 9). Westerfeld's novel includes some relevant examples which can be used for this purpose. The literary analysis from chapter 4 has shown that Tally's relationship with nature, once she leaves the city, has an educational and empowering effect on her. In a sense, her journey to the Smoke is Tally's "return to nature". Arigo (2014) uses an ecocritical lens to examine the concept of wilderness in *Uglies*. He argues

that Westerfeld's description of the wild can lead to discussions about the influence that the wilderness has on Tally, who "evolves from a city kid, ignorant of anything beyond the purview of the city" (p. 116). Therefore, analysing these aspects from the novel could encourage students to reflect on their relation to the environment, help them understand the benefits of nature and the need to live in a sustainable way within it.

Furthermore, teachers could opt for more practical approaches and plan cross-curricular projects which can allow a focus not only on the core value *respect for nature and environmental awareness*, but on *the joy of creating, engagement and the urge to explore* as well. They can let their students explore nature in the near surroundings, and encourage them to find solutions to current problems, getting involved in environmental school projects and raising awareness about these issues.

5.4 Concluding remarks

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the didactic benefits of *Uglies* and *Flawed* in light of the three interdisciplinary topics from the curriculum: *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development*. The discussion has brought together concrete examples from the novels and theory from previous studies, to show the educational relevance of YA dystopian literature for the English classes in Norwegian secondary schools. The interplay between the core values and principles from the curricula documents and the typical young adult and dystopian tropes addressed in *Uglies* and Flawed highlights the potential of this genre in the classroom. Reading and analysing YA dystopias can help students reflect on issues related to their personal development and identity, as well as the social structures and the political situation in their society, and even encourage them to participate in the efforts to protect nature and raise environmental awareness.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the educational potential of YA dystopian literature in the English subject in Norwegian secondary schools after the implementation of the revised curricula documents. More precisely, it has sought to answer the research question: How is young adult dystopian literature useful for integrating interdisciplinary topics into English subject teaching? A literature review of previous studies has been employed to determine the general benefits of this genre, as well as the current situation in the Norwegian context, regarding the use of YA dystopian literature in the classroom. Further, a discussion of the core curriculum and the English subject curriculum has highlighted the values and principles of education in Norway, the significance of the three interdisciplinary topics – *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development* – as well as the relevance of YA dystopias for the English subject. The two novels selected for the purpose of this study – *Uglies* (2005), by Scott Westerfeld and *Flawed* (2016), by Cecelia Ahern – have been used to show the relationship between the values and principles from the curricula documents and the generic tropes of YA dystopian literature, and thus to exemplify the possibilities that this genre opens up for implementing the interdisciplinary topics in the English subject.

6.1 Summary of findings

The literature review has revealed that YA dystopian literature is perceived as a suitable genre for classroom use, having great educational potential. Internationally, various scholars have shown interest in this genre, either by theoretically examining its didactic benefits, or by developing practical approaches that allow them to use this kind of literature with their students. Regardless of the methods employed, the results of these studies have shown that the great didactic potential of YA dystopian literature lies in the topics addressed, which are relevant for young readers on the verge of stepping into adulthood. By reading and analysing dystopias, students can develop their critical thinking skills, learn about topical issues, such as social and political ones, and even environmental concerns. Moreover, this could also lead to an increased motivation for actively participating in their community, engaging in different projects.

Further, it was shown that YA dystopian literature presents a lot of didactic benefits in the Norwegian context as well, based on similar considerations as those mentioned above, as well as key values (e.g., *critical thinking and ethical awareness*, *respect for nature and environmental awareness*, *democracy and participation*) from the core curriculum. By

addressing social and moral issues, environmental challenges, and aspects related to *Bildung*, such as identity and personal development, YA dystopias can help students not only reflect on different aspects and challenges of the contemporary world, but also on their own lives, values and actions. However, although in-service teachers in upper secondary schools acknowledge the suitability of the genre for classroom use, they also report that they seldom use YA dystopias with their students.

The discussion of the curricula documents indicated that the values and principles on which education in Norway is based are interconnected not only to the interdisciplinary topics – *health and life skills*, *democracy and citizenship*, and *sustainable development* – but also to typical themes addressed in YA dystopian literature. This was later demonstrated through the literary analysis of the two novels and the discussion of their didactic benefits. The literary analysis revealed that both novels include common YA and dystopian tropes, such as identity, growing up, relationships, ethical and political issues and environmental concerns. The discussion was focused on how these themes are relevant for Norwegian students, in light of the interdisciplinary topics and the values and principles from the core curriculum. By identifying with Tally and Celestine, as well as other characters, young readers can learn to reflect on their own identities, deal with challenging situations and evaluate their decisions. Moreover, by comparing the fictitious scenarios from the novels with real life, they can see and understand social and political problems in contemporary society, as well as the environmental dangers that the world faces, and be inspired to get involved in finding possible solutions to these issues.

6.2 Further research

This thesis has demonstrated that YA dystopian literature is highly relevant for Norwegian students in secondary school, especially when working with the interdisciplinary topics. Nonetheless, as mentioned in section 1.4, where I acknowledge the limitations of the thesis, my approach, although it touches upon some practical ways of employing the novels in the classroom, is mainly theoretical. The chosen novels have been used to exemplify the relevance of the genre more broadly. Moreover, the revised core curriculum and English subject curriculum are newly implemented in schools. Therefore, more time and research are needed in order to fully examine the educational potential of this genre from a practical perspective. Thus, future research could include empirical studies, as well as concrete suggestions for bringing extracts from the novels into the classroom. Additionally, more studies like Guanio-

Uluru's (2019) ecocritical pilot study could contribute to overcoming the gap between theory and teachers' confidence in integrating interdisciplinary topics in the classroom.

References

Ahern, C. (2016). *Flawed*. HarperCollins Publishers.

Alsup, J. (2010). Introduction: Identification, actualization, or education: Why read YAL? In J. Alsup (Ed.), *Young adult literature and adolescent identity across cultures and classrooms : contexts for the literary lives of teens* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

Ames, M. (2013). Engaging "apolitical" adolescents: Analyzing the popularity and educational potential of dystopian literature post-9/11. *The High School Journal, 97*(1), 3-20.

Arigo, C. (2014). Creating an Eco-warrior: Wilderness and identity in the dystopian world of Scott Westerfeld's Uglies series. In C. Hill (Ed.), *The critical merits of young adult literature: Coming of age* (pp. 133-147). Routledge.

Aughterson, K. (2016). Teaching utopia matters from More, to Piercy and Atwood. In K. Shaw (Ed.), *Teaching 21st Century Genres* (pp. 91-107). Palgrave Macmillan.

Basu, B. (2013). What faction are you in?. In B. Basu, K. R. Broad, & C. Hintz (Eds.), *Contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults: Brave new teenagers* (pp. 19-33). Routledge.

Basu, B., Broad, K. R., & Hintz, C. (2013). *Contemporary dystopian fiction for young adults: Brave new teenagers*. Routledge.

Bland, J. (2020). Using literature for intercultural learning in English language education. In M. Dypedahl & R. E. Lund (Eds.), *Teaching and learning English interculturally* (pp. 69-89). Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

Booker, M. K. (2014). *Historical dictionary of science fiction in literature*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Booker, M. K., & Thomas, A.-M. (2009). *The science fiction handbook*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Brevik, L. M., & Lyngstad, M. E. (2020). The role of literature in the English classroom. In L. Brevik & U. Rindal (Eds.), *Teaching English in Norwegian classrooms: from research to practice* (pp. 163-189). Universitetsforlaget.

Carlsen, C. (2018). Reading literature. In H. Bøhn, M. Dypedahl, & G.-A. Myklevold (Eds.), *Teaching and learning English* (pp. 120-138). Cappelen Damm akademisk.

Coleman, J. C. (2011). *The Nature of Adolescence*. Routledge.

Dahlen, S. P. (2020). "We need diverse books": diversity, activism, and children's literature. In *Literary cultures and twenty-first-century childhoods* (pp. 83-108). Palgrave Macmillan.

Daley, M. (2019). *Raising Readers : How to nurture a child's love of books*. University of Queensland Press.

Donnelly, S. D. (2019). *Future girls: revolutionary adolescence in young adult dystopian fiction 2005-2018* [PhD. thesis, University of Birmingham]. EBIRA E theses. https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/9051/

Fernando, C. (2021, March 16). Racial diversity in children's books grows, but slowly. *AP News*. https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-wisconsin-madison-childrens-books-480e49bd32ef45e163d372201df163ee

Fritz, S. S. (2014). Girl power and girl activism in the fiction of Suzanne Collins, Scott Westerfeld, and Moira Young. In S. K. Day, M. A. Green-Barteet, & A. L. Montz (Eds.), *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (pp. 17-31). Ashgate.

Gadowski, R. (2014). Critical dystopia for young people: The freedom meme in American young adult dystopian science fiction. In J. Matyjaszczyk, P. Spyra, & A. Wicher (Eds.), *Basic categories of fantastic literature revisited* (pp. 144-160). Cambridge Scholars Publisher.

Garcia, A. (2013). *Critical foundations in young adult literature : Challenging genres*. Sense Publishers.

Guanio-Uluru, L. (2019). Education for sustainability: Developing ecocritical literature circles in the student teacher classroom. *Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education*, *10*(1), 5-19.

Hilton, M., & Nikolajeva, M. (2012). *Contemporary adolescent literature and culture : The emergent adult*. Routledge.

Hintz, C., & Ostry, E. (2003). *Utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults*. Routledge.

Jiotsa, B., Naccache, B., Duval, M., Rocher, B., & Grall-Bronnec, M. (2021). Social media use and body image disorders: Association between frequency of comparing one's own physical appearance to that of people being followed on social media and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *18*(6), 2880. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18062880

Kealley, A. (2017). Escaping adolescence: Sonya Hartnett's Surrender as a Gothic Bildungsroman for the twenty-first century. *Children's Literature in Education*, *48*(4), 295-307.

Krashen, S. (2013). Free reading: Still a great idea. In J. Bland & C. Lütge (Eds.), *Children's literature in second language education* (pp. 27-36). Bloomsbury.

Kunnskapsdepartementet. (2019). *Core curriculum – values and principles for primary and secondary education.* https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/verdier-og-prinsipper-for-grunnopplaringen---overordnet-del-av-lareplanverket/id2570003/

Kusch, C. (2016). *Literary analysis: The basics*. Routledge.

Lafferty, K. E. (2014). "What are you reading?": How school libraries can promote racial diversity in multicultural literature. *Multicultural Perspectives, 16*(4), 203-209.

Lafuente, E. M. (2012). Nationhood, struggle and identity. In M. Hilton & M. Nikolajeva (Eds.), *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture : The Emergent Adult* (pp. 33-46). Routledge.

Larrick, N. (1965). The all-white world of children's books. *Saturday Review, 48*(11), 63-65. https://www.unz.com/print/SaturdayRev-1965sep11-00063

Lyngstad, M. E. (2019). *English teachers' choices and beliefs about literature in Norwegian upper secondary classroom.* [PhD. thesis, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences]. Brage. https://brage.inn.no/inn-xmlui/handle/11250/2620522

Lütge, C. (2013). Otherness in children's literature. Perspectives for the EFL classroom. In J. Bland & C. Lütge (Eds.), *Children's literature in second language education* (pp. 97-105). Bloomsbury.

Marsh, M. (2021). Bertie Ahern. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertie-Ahern

Marshall, M. (2014). What mainstream centers cannot hold: Growing critical literacy with dystopian fiction. In P. Paugh, T. Kress, & R. Lake (Eds.), *Teaching towards democracy with postmodern and popular culture texts* (pp. 135-150). Sense Publisher.

McDonough, M., & Wagner, K. A. (2014). Rebellious natures: The role of nature in young adult dystopian female protagonists' awakenings and agency. In S. K. Day, M. A. Green-Barteet, & A. L. Montz (Eds.), *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (pp. 157-170). Ashgate.

Moran, M. J. (2014). The three faces of Tally Youngblood: Rebellious identity-changing in Scott Westerfeld's "Uglies" series. In S. K. Day, M. A. Green-Barteet, & A. L. Montz (Eds.), *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (pp. 123-139). Ashgate.

Ostry, E. (2013). On the brink: The role of young adult culture in environmental degradation. In B. Basu, K. R. Broad, & C. Hintz (Eds.), *Contemporary dystopian literature for young adults: Brave new teenagers* (pp. 101-114). Routledge.

Paravano, C. (2021). Developing the F-word: Representing adolescent womanhood and race in young adult dystopian novels. In K. Ostalska & T. Fisiak (Eds.), *The postworld in-between utopia and dystopia* (pp. 199-208). Routledge.

Paugh, P. (2014). Introduction. In P. Paugh, T. Kress, & R. Lake (Eds.), *Teaching towards democracy with postmodern and popular culture texts* (pp. 1-5). Sense Publishers.

PBS Books. (2016, April 10). *Cecelia Ahern on "Flawed" at the 2016 L.A. Times Festival of Books*, [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJDeCNbA3Bc

Rodríguez, Á. G. (2016). Recurrent dystopian themes in Scott Westerfeld's novel 'Uglies'. *Angloamericanae Journal, 1*(1), 61-84.

Rudd, D. (2010). *The Routledge companion to children's literature*. Routledge.

Sargent, L. T. (2013). Do dystopias matter? In F. Vieira (Ed.), *Dystopia(n) matters: on the page, on screen, on stage* (pp. 10-13).

Scholes, J., & Ostenson, J. (2013). Understanding the appeal of dystopian young adult fiction. *The Allan Review, 40*(2), 11-20.

Simmons, A. M. (2014). Class on fire: Using the Hunger Games trilogy to encourage social action. In P. Paugh, T. Kress, & R. Lake (Eds.), *Teaching towards democracy with postmodern and popular culture texts* (pp. 77-95). Sense Publishers.

Stableford, B. (2010). Ecology and dystopia. In G. Claeys (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to utopian literature* (pp. 259-285). Cambridge University Press.

Strickland, A. (2015, April 15). A brief history of young adult literature. *CNN*. https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/15/living/young-adult-fiction-evolution/index.html

Thomas, E. E. (2016). Stories still matter: Rethinking the role of diverse children's literature today. *Language Arts*, *94*(2), 112-119.

Utdanningsdirektoratet. (2020). *Curriculum in English* https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04?lang=eng

Vieira, F. (2010). The concept of utopia. In G. Claeys (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to utopian literature* (pp. 3-27). Cambridge University Press.

Westerfeld, S. (2005/2011). *Uglies*. Simon Pulse.

Westerfeld, S. (2012). Teens and dystopia. *Scott Westerfeld*. https://scottwesterfeld.com/blog/2012/09/teens-and-dystopias/?fbclid=IwAR2afTwGPr5tAxKwkCYSTkTdVd6NdrFnqY1g9wEDcybRhCz8gl23RtX4NJE

Wilkinson, R. (2010). Teaching dystopian literature to a consumer class. *English Journal, 99*(3), 22-26.

Williams, G. (2021). Novels for teenage readers. In A. Normann & G. Williams (Eds.), *Literature for the English classroom : theory into practice* (pp. 141-165). Fagbokforlaget.

Zipes, J. (2003). Foreword: Utopia, dystopia, and the quest for hope. In C. Hintz & E. Ostry (Eds.), *Utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults* (pp. ix-xi). Routledge.