# Young People Exploring Their Media Experiences

*Mediagraphy as a Reflection Tool in Upper Secondary School*

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores how upper secondary students reflect on their media practices while participating in the learning activity of mediagraphy. Mediagraphy involves researching four generations of one's own family with respect to e.g. media use, identity, and education and then writing an essay based on this information. A case study is presented, in which mediagraphy was implemented in upper secondary school for the first time. The data sources are classroom observation, student essays, and interviews. The analysis is guided by a categorization of reflection types: qualification, competence, creativity, meta-perspectives, and critical reflection. The findings show that the students identify and question implicit characteristics of culture and society, and critically evaluate their own choices and actions in a media-saturated everyday life.

### Keywords

Media education, media literacy, mediagraphy, critical reflection

## INTRODUCTION

A reflective and critical viewpoint of one's everyday media experiences and the general media context has become an essential prerequisite for active participation in society (Buckingham, 2007; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2011). Scholars therefore argue that learning activities developing media-literate students, defined as independent, critical and reflective media users and participants, should be emphasized in school settings (Arnolds-Granlund, 2010; Erstad, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). However, the current most common teaching methods are, to a large extent, inadequate for such purposes (Gee, 2013; Kellner & Share, 2007; Østerud, 2012), and few studies have examined reflection as part of media literacy in school settings. In other words, we need to know more about what characterizes young people's reflections on their everyday media experiences and how such reflections can play a part in actual learning activities.

This article reports on an exploratory case study of 27 media students in a Norwegian upper secondary school where *mediagraphy* for the first time was

implemented as a learning activity at an educational level other than tertiary education. In mediagraphy, students research four generations of their own families, looking for factors such as: media use and experiences, identity, lifestyle, education, and attitudes. The aim is to explore the students' reflections during the mediagraphy project, with a particular focus on how they reflected on their own media practices and how they understood these practices in light of historical-, cultural-, and media-related developments.

The following two key research questions guide the analysis and discussion:

1   *What characterizes upper secondary students' reflections on their own media practices while working with mediagraphy?*

2   *How do the students express their experience of mediagraphy as a reflection tool?*

## MEDIAGRAPHY – A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

*Global mediagraphy* has been developed relatively recently; thus, there are only a few studies on its application. It was introduced by Rantanen (2005) as a method for examining the media as a driving force in the process of globalization. She studied this through the individual life stories of four generations in three families across the world. A 'mediagraphy table', which consisted of specific globalization factors, such as media use, sense of identity and belonging, lifestyle and education, was the main analytical tool. In this way, complex macro processes were connected to concrete experiences in the participants' individual lives. This table is presented in more detail in the method section. Rantanen (2005) remarked that exercises such as mediagraphy can lead to *self-reflexivity*. She found that when the research participants reflected on their own experiences and relations to other family members, they developed an awareness of similarities and differences across time and space. The potential pedagogical implications of mediagraphy were, however, sparsely described in Rantanen's (2005) study and require further investigation in pedagogical contexts.

Vettenranta (2010) applied the concept of global mediagraphy to higher education. Master's degree students were appointed as researchers studying four generations of their own families, including themselves. The students interviewed family members, and wrote a discussion based on the factors in Rantanen's mediagraphy table. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1986) distinction between everyday and scientific concepts, Vettenranta argued that the students' understanding benefitted from connecting concrete experiences and knowledge from their everyday life to systematic, abstract, and theoretical knowledge. This is a crucial point for media education – school is emphasized as an essential institution for developing young people's concrete media experiences into more conceptual knowledge (Buckingham, 2003; Burn & Durran, 2007; Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2011). The students gained insight into the

relationship between the media and globalization on the macro level and individual media practices on the micro level. Additionally, Vettenranta (2010, 2011) found that the students practiced self-reflection. Similar findings were reported from the pilot project for the present study (Schofield, 2012). It should be noted that for Rantanen and Vettenranta, a major concern was to examine aspects of globalization, whereas the focus in this article is more directed at young people's reflections as they work with mediagraphy. The method is thus here referred to as mediagraphy, without the prefix 'global'.

Ponte and Aroldi (2013) conducted a project similar to mediagraphy as part of a study titled 'Digital Inclusion and Participation'. Students at Master's level participated in 'focus group simulations' (p. 170), where they discussed media events and experiences over several generations. Additionally, the students wrote individual essays on this topic. Ponte and Aroldi (2013) found that the students developed a generational consciousness and a stronger theoretical understanding of media science and research methodology, which in turn empowered a sociological imagination and self-reflexivity.

Scholars commenting on mediagraphy have emphasized the method's potential for transformative educational implications (Havrevold, 2011; Orgeret, 2012; Østerud, 2011, 2012), but they have also pointed out a need to strengthen the methodological aspects of mediagraphy (Gilje, 2011; Nyre, 2010). With this background, an objective of the present study is to substantiate a more rigorous methodological and theoretical basis for the pedagogical implications of mediagraphy. In the following section, I will apply an analytical framework for reflection from a media education and media literacy perspective.

## FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING REFLECTION

Qvortrup (2004) described today's society as a hypercomplexity made up of intricate networks and characterized by increasing uncertainty. This complexity is closely related to the technical, cultural, and social developments that have fundamentally changed the way we communicate and practice our social selves. Therefore, more complex knowledge and competence are required from the people living in this society. According to Qvortrup (2004), if we are to reduce complexity and uncertainty, we must be able to think reflexively. Through reflection, we can improve our ability to adopt a critically distanced perspective, reflect on our actions and act reflexively; and it is in this way that we are able to make choices and judgments.

Qvortrup's (2004) taxonomy of reflection allows for an analysis that takes into account both different types and levels of reflection (see also Fritze & Haugsbakk, 2012). The basis for this account is the different forms of knowledge, *qualifications, competencies, creativity*, and *meta-perspectives*. In the present study, the *qualification* level represents the knowledge that the students had of

the media and the technical skills that helped them to solve the task at hand. These skills could be used in the project, but this requires competence, which is the second level in the taxonomy. *Competence* involves learning about different concepts and understanding the task and genre that the mediagraphy text is to be written in. On the third, *creative* level, a task, for example, is approached independently, and competencies are used across different contexts. In the mediagraphy project, this corresponded to providing an individual angle to both form and content. As the participants are students in a practical-aesthetic programme, one could expect that they would include some creative elements in their assignments. On the *meta-perspectives level*, to reflect means that you see yourself externally and that you are able to identify developments in media and technology in a societal and historical context. In the mediagraphy project, an analysis of society and a form of self-understanding became equally important prerequisites for making such reflections; e.g., when a student wanted to articulate what significance social media has had in his or her everyday life.

Media literacy scholars have often explicitly emphasized the *critical* aspect of reflection (Burn & Durran, 2007; Jenkins, 2007). In this study, I view critical reflection in line with Reynolds (1998, p. 183), who defined it as an ability to identify and question 'the contextual taken-for-granteds – social, cultural and political'. Similarly, but more oriented towards self-reflection, Wahlgren, Høyrup, Pedersen, and Rattleff (2002) argued reflection is the conscious evaluations we make on our actions and the consequences of them. The critical aspect adds considerations of *why* we should act in certain ways in certain situations. Critical reflection is not included in Qvortrup's framework, but it can be seen as part of both the creative and meta-perspective levels. However, I see the need to explicitly emphasize critical reflection as an analytical aspect. These various aspects of reflection are summarized in Table 1.

## TABLE 1. FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING REFLECTION

| Knowledge forms | Student production |
| --- | --- |
| Qualifications | Different technical skills and everyday knowledge |
| Competencies | The use of skills and knowledge in a defined context – to be familiar with and able to apply concepts, genres and expressive forms |
| Creativity | Independent and creative approach to genres and expressive forms. Can be actualized through e.g. teaching that stimulates creative activities |
| Meta-perspectives | Seeing oneself from outside, and being able to place developments in media and technology in a societal and historical context |
| Critical reflection | Identifying and questioning the 'taken-for-granted', and critical evaluations of one's own choices and actions |
| *(Adapted from Fritze & Haugsbakk, 2012, p. 258; Qvortrup, 2004; Reynolds, 1998; Wahlgren et al., 2002).* | |

In the following analysis, I specifically focus on *mediated action*, which was advocated by Wertsch (1998) as the most informative unit of analysis in sociocultural research. According to Wertsch (1998), all human action is mediated through *mediational means*, such as everyday objects, technologies, and social institutions. Mediated action refers to different kinds of real-time actions where social actors, mediational means, and context intersect. I see the classroom discussions, the student texts and the interviews as different mediated actions that were made accessible to the students as they participated in the mediagraphy project. In other words, I analyze mediagraphy as a mediational means, which allows me to assign the different mediated actions with equal value in the analysis. In this way they can be taken into consideration to understand the various expressions for reflection that took place during the mediagraphy project.

Qvortrup's knowledge forms can be seen as something that can potentially be achieved through various learning processes. However, as Dalsgaard (2007) points out, a weakness in Qvortrup's taxonomy is that the relationship between the knowledge forms and learning processes is unclear. Therefore, I apply Wertsch's concept of mediated action to analyze how the students' interactions with mediagraphy as a mediational means are significant for their reflections. As such, Qvortrup's model represents a theoretical framework for categorizing the students' reflections, while Wertsch's concept of mediated action is the unit of analysis. Mediated action makes the students' different activities visible, each of them involving different types of reflections, and potentially different forms of knowledge.

## CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted for a period of five weeks during five to ten lessons per week in the autumn of 2011 in a class of 27 students attending the Vg3 General Studies Programme in Media and Communication at an upper secondary school in Norway.  The gender distribution was 14 girls and 13 boys, all of Norwegian citizenship and ethnicity. Interviews with 13 selected students, 7 boys and 6 girls, were conducted in January / February 2012. The selection was made to illustrate a variety of characteristics, quality and work effort levels among the students. The project school offers primarily programmes for specialization in general studies, but also creative programmes like media and communication.

The Media and Communication Programme in Norway is a somewhat unique case for studying learning and teaching in the interface between in-school and out-of-school media practices. For the first two years, the programme is basically a vocational media education programme, and most of the classes are related to practical, creative media use and production. To date, few studies have explored the media students' media practices. A report by Erstad, Gilje, and de Lange (2007) described these students as 'heavy consum-

ers' of media, particularly the Internet, and as experienced media producers. Hence, on the one hand, this student group might have a particular need for skills to critically reflect on their media practices. On the other hand, they can provide special insight into how young people reflect on their media practices, as it can be assumed that these students have a plethora of media experiences to reflect upon.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The study was conducted as an exploratory case study, which implies that a contemporary phenomenon is broadly investigated in its real-life context (Yin, 2013), in this case a classroom setting. Data was collected from a combination of several sources: participatory observation, interviews and an exploration of student products. The purpose of the research was presented to the participants and repeated when necessary, and endeavours were made to ensure that my presence as a researcher interfered as little as possible with the day-to-day activities (see e.g. Fangen, 2010). The student products are referred to as 'mediagraphy essays'. They are responses to a school assignment, but as they are based on reflections on experiences in the lives of the students and their families, they also have the characteristics of self-reflective subjective narratives and *life stories*. Life stories can serve as important data for studying the complex, equivocal relations between self and social context (Almås & Gullestad, 1990; Harrison, 2009). The interviews were semi-structured and 'focused', an interview type that, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), resembles the in-depth interview, but is a narrower alternative. In this case, the interviews were based on the preliminary analysis of observations and the student products.

The reliability of this study is a matter of coherence between empirical data, analysis, and findings (Tjora, 2010). I have sought to achieve this through transparency, by explicating the analysis process and the underlying theoretical perspectives so that the readers can consider the credibility of the research (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). An important step towards strengthening the study's validity – that the study investigates what was intended – was done through triangulation. A variety of methods was used to achieve several potential interpretations and to gain broad insight into the area of focus. Triangulation can also contribute to clarify meaning and to identify different realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The depth and breadth of data from one group of students can be considered as a strength of this study, as it reports on the introduction of a learning activity. This corresponds with Merriam's (2009) emphasis of case study as a design well suited for research on educational innovations. At the same time, this represents some of the limitations of the study: A relatively small sample was used and a singular case study does not allow comparisons with other student groups or other teaching methods. This is also related to the extent to which

the findings can be generalized. The findings cannot be statistically general-ized, but they can be *analytically generalized*. This means that through confir-mation or modification of theoretical concepts, or possible development of new concepts, it is possible to use the findings of this study to analyze other similar situations (Yin, 2013).

The analysis process made some data more relevant than others, which helped to 'open up the field', while certain concepts and theories enhanced the understanding of the phenomena that were observed and interpreted in the case study. This type of approach, which is characteristic of *analytical induction* (Erickson, 2012), involved a process where, on the first level, I coded the material according to themes and then framed tentative assertions. The relevant research questions and interpretations of the data then emerged. I gradually recognized common themes that were developed into analytical categories. The actual coding was conducted using the qualitative software NVivo 9/10.

## THE STUDENT ASSIGNMENT

The practical task given to the students was to research one side of their fam-ily by collecting information about events and experiences in the lives of indi-viduals from four generations, including the students themselves. This infor-mation was collected according to Rantanen's mediagraphy table, as shown in Table 2. This table is a conceptualization of various factors in the four indi-vidual lives, structured to allow both an understanding of each individual and a comparison across generations. After an introduction to the pertinent the-ory and concepts, the students collected the data, developed a research ques-tion and undertook an analysis; they then wrote an interpretative essay. The data collection included conducting qualitative interviews, for which the stu-dents used primary sources when possible and secondary sources when fam-ily members had died or were difficult to contact. Material was also obtained from other sources, such as parish records or photo albums. Each student then analysed his or her table data in the light of their own media experiences from everyday life. As such, the media and media development became the pivotal point for the students' further analysis.

**TABLE 2. MEDIAGRAPHY TABLE**

| | Great-grandmother/Grandfather | Grandmother/Grandfather | Father/Mother | Son/Daughter (the student) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Profession | | | | |
| Home country | | | | |
| Place | | | | |
| Time | | | | |
| Changes in lifestyle | | | | |
| Education | | | | |
| Changes in class | | | | |
| Family | | | | |
| Travel | | | | |
| First journey abroad | | | | |
| Languages spoken | | | | |
| Media and communication | | | | |
| Global media event* | | | | |
| Interests | | | | |
| Ideology | | | | |
| Resistance to | | | | |
| Identity | | | | |
| * 'Global media event' is originally not used in Rantanen's (2005) research, but was added by the author and Rantanen in 2011 (adapted from Rantanen, 2005). | | | | |

The following sections include analysis of the empirical data. Excerpts that illustrate the various mediated actions of the process are analysed in the following order: Classroom discussions, student texts, and interviews.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS: 'DECODING' EVERYDAY MEDIA EXPERIENCES

The observation data suggest that the class talks were most often based on the students' relationships to various phenomena in their everyday lives. As I interpret it, the students' everyday experiences became central for two reasons. First, it seems that this was more or less a conscious move by the teacher. Second, many of the topics obviously motivated the students to connect personal experiences with the issues that were raised in the classroom. The students familiarized themselves with relevant theory, and media use and events experienced in and through the media were associated with relevant scientific concepts.

The classroom activities show that the mediagraphy method includes not only individual reflections, but also collective meaning-making processes. An excerpt from Martin, Lars, and Sandra's group presentation midway into the project illustrates such collective processes where theories and concepts and personal media experiences are connected. This presentation was part of the preparation of their mediagraphy research; their task was to interpret media development in the time period of 1990 to the present date and the possible consequences of this. The group prepared a visual presentation and a graphic timeline. The audience was their classmates and their teacher.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sandra: | What we have chosen to do is to first make a timeline that you can use as you read about this |
| 2 | | later. Then afterwards we'll talk a bit about what are like … the consequences of what has |
| 3 | | happened in this period. […] |
| 4 | Martin: | Right now we're living in a society where access to information is taken for granted, and |
| 5 | | through the Internet, mobile phones and PC, we can be online almost everywhere and at any |
| 6 | | time. […] This free access probably makes it more open, and we have the possibility to lead a |
| 7 | | more democratic and fair political life where the government isn't trying to keep things hidden. |
| 8 | | […] However, what is important to remember is to be critical of the sources because no matter |
| 9 | | how credible things might appear, there are many who misuse their opportunity of publishing |
| 10 | | information. And this brings us to the negative sides of this general access because it's more |
| 11 | | and more difficult to edit and control expressions of opinion on the net. This is basically a |
| 12 | | good thing if you think about democratic principles, but if users, for example, have the option |
| 13 | | of being anonymous, then they often have the tendency to express somewhat stronger opinions |
| 14 | | than usual. […] |
| 15 | Sandra: | Yes, I'm going to talk a little about […] how social media changes our communication because |
| 16 | | it has been very important in what we have talked about […] Social media is very big, and |
| 17 | | Facebook had 100 million new users in less than nine months, while radio used as much as 38 |
| 18 | | years to reach 50 million users. […] Really, you could say that the Internet and traditional |
| 19 | | media have developed from being a monologue into being a dialogue. Social media stands out |
| 20 | | because it is less formal, more user-controlled, and is simply not controlled by the sender. |
| 21 | | Several people describe this as a democratization of the freedom of speech because we have a |
| 22 | | new voice and participate actively instead of passively, and the distinction between the sender |
| 23 | | and receiver has in many ways faded. So, yeah … |

In Sandra's first statement, she was commenting on a graphic illustration (a timeline) of the media development from 1990 to the present. The illustration was designed by the group, and was thus a creative interpretation and an adaption of the theory they read in order to accomplish the task. In this case, the theory was taken from their syllabus literature, but online sources like Wikipedia were also important, as they were for the entire presentation. Martin gave a rather broad account of what he had learned about the last twenty years of media and technological development. At the same time, he discussed various aspects of the debate regarding the freedom of speech. The arguments were not necessarily something Martin had developed autonomously, as they could have been obtained from various sources, but he presented the arguments as if they represented his own opinion. His reflections were related to contemporary means of communication, such as the Internet, mobile phone, and PC, which Martin obviously interacts with every day. However, he connected his experience with these devises to theoretical considerations. He drew in, for example, democratization and the freedom of speech, which were topics covered in the students' syllabus. But Martin's statements here also fall under what we can call participation theories, although he did not use the concept of 'participation' explicitly. He captured both some negative aspects of general access to the media and positive aspects related to being able to contribute in society as citizens. This touches upon the point made by Kupiainen (2013, p. 117) that participation is not 'self-evident', even when participation is emphasized as an integral part of the media.

Lastly, Sandra discussed social media. She analysed the prevalence and characteristics of Facebook, and described it in relation to different communication models and democracy. She used acquired knowledge to analyse her own media use. As such, the application of scientific concepts became a mediated action (cf. Wertsch, 1998) that enabled Sandra to describe and interpret the significance the media has to her and others. Sandra's description of the growth of social media (lines 16–18) is information that can be found through Internet searches. Sandra used this information to make reflections about the Internet's rapid growth and linked this to key aspects in media studies, like user control, young people's 'voice' in the media and the freedom of speech.

These participants were, as I see it, in a process of decoding their media experiences, as they were attempting to understand them in the light of concepts and theories from media studies (e.g., lines 4–8, 18–20), and also from other fields of knowledge and general issues (e.g., lines 21–23). They were tentatively interpreting their thoughts about media in terms of some generally accepted ways of thinking within the discourse of media studies and were using concepts that were focused on during the mediagraphy project. This was confirmed in the interviews, although the degree to which the participants valued the significance of the joint sessions varied. Additionally, both Martin (lines 9–14) and Sandra (lines 18–20) reflected on a meta-level, as they articulated and placed developments in media and technology.

The classroom discussions can be said to mediate (cf. Wertsch, 1998) a more complex imagery of historical events and concepts. Mediagraphy can thus be described as a method to visualize theories and to link personal stories and experiences to scientific concepts. The students were using knowledge on the qualification level (cf. Qvortrup, 2004) in a defined context while they were trying to explain and apply various concepts. This characterizes knowledge on the competence level and corresponds with Vettenranta's (2010) findings in the sense that the students associated concrete experiences with abstract theories.

## MEDIAGRAPHY ESSAYS: META-PERSPECTIVES AND IDENTIFYING THE 'TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED'

In this section, I have chosen to examine the mediagraphy essay of one student, Martin. Even though Martin can be described as a high-achieving student, I consider his essay to be representative of the class, because many of the participants used scientific concepts and ways of thinking to reflect on a meta-level on complex issues concerning both society *and* themselves. Martin's essay was titled 'Mediated Experiences Through a Globalization Perspective'. Experiences in 'real life' and as mediated through different media were the recurring theme in his story.

Through his great-grandmother 'Kari', grandfather 'Hans', mother 'Jane', and 'Martin' himself, he reflected on how increased media use and a more media-saturated society have made global media events less 'shocking' and easier to forget. Martin's great-grandmother has never forgotten Fridtjof Nansen's  public speech about 'the new Norway', which he gave in her home-town in 1928. Grandfather Hans was deeply affected by apartheid, and Jane had nightmares because of the TV images of starving children in Biafra. Bearing such examples in mind, Martin discussed his own media experiences and claimed that the contemporary abundance of global media events has gradually made him more indifferent to dramatic incidents portrayed in the media. He outlined these ideas against the larger backdrop of globalization and media development. In the introduction, he provided a background for his research question: 'Do mediated events affect us as strongly as they used to?'

1    In this assignment, I will try to find an answer to how mediated experiences have changed over time,
2    how the experiences in themselves have changed and how the impacts of the experiences have changed.
3    Subsequently I will link this to the much-discussed concept of globalization. All this is based on
4    interviews conducted with my mother, my grandfather and my great-grandmother.

In this excerpt, Martin created a basis for meta-perspectives (cf. Qvortrup, 2004) and critical reflections (cf. Reynolds, 1998) related to 'mediated experiences' and 'globalization'. He wanted to analyse some type of cultural and historical development ('how mediated experiences have changed over time'). Moreover, he attempted to understand how the experiences have changed (lines 2–3), which required an effort to gain insight into media and technological development as well as social and cultural developments. Like most of the participants, Martin used a number of different information sources in addition to the information from his family members. He made use of sources such as *Store Norske Leksikon* (the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*), Rantanen's *Media and Globalization* (2005), Wikipedia, and other Internet services and information from other school subjects' textbooks. Through this, Martin found that concepts like globalization are not one-dimensional; on the contrary they are controversial and have different interpretations and applications. This can be seen in line 3, where Martin wrote about 'the much-discussed concept of globalization'. Line 4 shows that Martin used his interpretations of specific experiences to understand and reflect on phenomena such as globalization and mediation. The external perspective involves the meta-perspective, while the identification of societal and cultural traits involves critical reflection.

The conclusion in Martin's essay could be understood as a comment intended for the reader or for himself. He reflected on the research process, his struggles in understanding concepts and his own work.

1    Throughout this period, I have researched and tried to understand concepts such as globalization and
2    mediation, and I have tried to link them to my own family. I have found parallels, and I clearly see how
3    globalization increases in strength from one generation to the next.

This can be seen as a type of self-reflection that requires the ability to see one-self externally (cf. Wahlgren et al., 2002). Moreover, the statement on line 3 suggests firstly that Martin gained some kind of understanding of the concept and the phenomenon globalization and secondly that he identified a feature of society that, to some extent, is taken for granted (Reynolds, 1998).

The process of writing mediagraphy essays was a mediated action where the students indulged in detailed work with data from interviews as well as with theories and concepts. They also employed knowledge and skills from other areas and subjects. As such, a more complex understanding of society, globalization, the media and themselves was mediated, making more complex and multifaceted reflections possible.

## INTERVIEWS: INCIPIENT CRITICAL REFLECTION

The interviews with a sample of participants were conducted about eight weeks after the project was completed. The participants reflected on various aspects of the project, such as their own learning, their thoughts about the project and their sense and understanding of themselves in the present time. The reflections became more personal and incipient critical perspectives were more apparent than in the other phases of the project. An example of such reflections can be seen in the interview with Frank, who reflected on identity and media development. In the interview, he discussed values and ethics and described his own personal stance.

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1    Frank:   Yes, I wasn't really that … what should I call it? – Absolutely certain … when I talked about
2             my identity before I had gone through and got into it through this assignment. It's first after the
3             assignment that it has become something that I … bring up and that I'm really interested in.
4             […]
5    Daniel:  […] The enormous media developments, if we can call it that, […] what do you think about
6             that, in relation to this project? […]
7    Frank:   In relation to identity and things like that? […] Yes – well, it's- if you think about Facebook
8             and stuff, it's like a cry to show off who you are … this in turn has to do with identity.
9    Daniel:  Yes…
10   Frank:   People feel like telling about what they are up to and what they do… and it's like some of it –
11            which I write about – that's the new version of identity. […] Is that people … are tired of
12            generalizations and stigmatization and stuff, and they rather want to tell their life story and
13            what they do and stuff and let people decide from that who they are. […] This kind of
14            reflection, it can be drawn into a lot of different things, like… that has a lot to do with
15            prejudices, and … today racism, homophobia, and things like that.
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Different societal issues that were articulated during the mediagraphy project are the basis for Frank's reflections here, and specific self-perceived concerns are mirrored with his own attitudes and judgments. Frank reflected on his own work process, took a meta-perspective and evaluated his own choices (lines 1–2), possible outcomes of the project, and his own learning process (lines 2–3), which implies some level of understanding of a sociocultural practice. At the same time, the concept of 'identity' was brought into the discussion as a notion that he had learned about and had started to apply in different situations outside this project. In lines 7–8, Frank drew his understanding of identity into an analysis of a social medium. This can be understood as asking

critical questions about traits in his immediate societal context. To some extent, he also considered a practice he himself was part of.

Lines 10–15 illustrate that Frank had actively investigated situations in his own lifeworld as well as in a larger context, suggested conclusions and made judgments. Moreover, he added a further understanding of the concept of identity to this and took a critical position on how people he knew were performing their social practices in social media. In this, I also read an inherent critical consideration of his own choices (cf. Wahlgren et al., 2002). As can be seen in lines 13–15, Frank mentioned general topics like racism and homophobia. These are concepts that, to some extent, contain implicit critical perspectives, and he used them to ask critical questions about phenomena he has identified and reflected on during and after this project. It seems that for Frank, both the mediagraphy method and the interview are tools that mediate critical reflection in the sense that the reflections include contemplations on the purpose and possible consequences of one's own and others' actions. He also identified and questioned characteristics of his own social and cultural contexts (cf. Reynolds, 1998).

## DISCUSSION

In a complex environment such as a classroom, there will inevitably be considerable variations among students when it comes to commitment, invested effort, performance, and learning outcomes. This was also the case with this study. Nonetheless, some trends could be identified regarding reflection and critical reflection. Analysis of the classroom discussions, texts and interviews as different mediated actions indicates that mediagraphy mediates reflections that link the students' everyday media experiences to a broader sociocultural and historical context. Through Qvortrup's (2004) taxonomy, an account of the findings according to the research questions is possible. The first research question was: *What characterizes upper secondary students' reflections on their own media practices while working with mediagraphy?*

As shown in excerpts above, the students' media experiences were included as a starting point for the classroom activities. The teacher encouraged this, but the students also spontaneously based their reflection on their own media experiences and applied their existing media-related knowledge and skills. This corresponds to the *qualification* level. As the project progressed, many of the students applied certain scientific concepts and ways of thinking to their reasoning. This was the case with the excerpt from the group presentation. As such, classroom activities like joint talks and prepared presentations are mediated actions that include reflections on the *competence* level; a knowledge form that, in line with Qvortrup (2004), has a potential general value beyond the specific situation through the use of scientific concepts.

The *creative* level in Qvortrup's framework entails taking an independent approach to the task and to the involved genre. This characterizes the reflections in many of the students' essays. This group of students seemed to be familiar with practical project work and was able to apply the mediagraphy method to their own lifeworlds; they investigated and tried to understand a variety of issues in an independent way. As such, mediagraphy mediated reflections on the creative level when the students explored the 'real world' from a personal perspective. As Martin's example illustrates, in their mediagraphy essays, the students took an outsider's point of view on themselves as well as on more general, societal issues. A special feature of mediagraphy seems to be that the articulation of individual life experiences in specific contexts is coupled with the analysis of the larger general context. As such, the essays were also characterized by *meta-perspectives* directed both on the students themselves and on the general, societal, historical and media-related contexts. As I see it, the written form of the essay and the time involved in the research process mediates such kinds of reflections.

*Critical reflection* became an important aspect of the interviews. The students reflected on issues they had identified in their process and questioned aspects they had, at least to some extent, taken for granted prior to the project. The example of Frank shows a student who evaluated the contexts surrounding him and that he was a part of. He also explicitly took a stand on an issue and judged it. As such, the interviews in themselves became meaning-making processes. In this way, they mediated both self-evaluation and the evaluation of the project in addition to reflections on the significance of the learning involved. In a sense, this underscores the importance of retrospective reflection of such a process, particularly with respect to potential learning outcome.

The interviews involved several types of reflection, including evaluation, self-reflection and reflections on a *meta*-level. The second research question (*How do the students express their experience of mediagraphy as a reflection tool?*) was illuminated here. The mediagraphy project was based on personal experiences, and it therefore had different meanings for different participants. The way the students reflected emerges as a common outcome, which is something that many of the participants also emphasized in their interviews. The students stated, for instance, that mediagraphy made them 'think of something' in a 'new' way; they applied concepts they did not know – or familiar concepts in a new way. Several also expressed, like Frank, that the concepts in some way mediated 'seeing' something in themselves or in society. In sum, this indicates that mediagraphy does not have a one-dimensional learning outcome. A somewhat more complex picture must be drawn to capture what comes out of such a complex project.

As described in the method section, there are certain limitations associated with a singular case study such as this. In these limitations, some guidelines for further research on mediagraphy in education can be found. Research on

mediagraphy applied in different groups of students in different disciplines, as well as at different ages, is welcome. Attention can also be directed to potential learning outcome of the method set against specific learning objectives, concepts or theories by comparing mediagraphy with other ways of learning.

When applied in upper secondary school with students who are experienced media users and producers, mediagraphy can be a project that mediates reflections that are rooted in the students' lifeworlds and that touches on their concerns and interests. Insight into media development and media use seems to be essential both for analyzing the social context and for a reflexive understanding of oneself. In this way, the media can be seen as a link between the individual and society, and in accordance with this, insight into the media can be seen as a key to understanding the interdependence between media use, identity and social context. As such, mediagraphy can potentially be a response to media literacy scholars who express the need for learning activities that develop media literate, reflective citizens who master the complexity of today's and tomorrow's culture.

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