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Norm Critical Projects in Swedish School Librarian Practices

Abstract

In this article, we explore the practices of school librarians with a specific focus on norm critical pedagogy, a distinctively Scandinavian concept with a basis in critical pedagogies. In Sweden, norm critique is a practice, a pedagogy and a discourse. Our article offers examples of school librarian practices that deal with issues of sexuality and gender conceptualized in their work with LGBTQ+ literature from a norm critical perspective. We analysed semi-structured interviews with eight librarians in four secondary and upper secondary schools through the lens of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Our findings demonstrate how the norm critical practices of school librarians are enabled and constrained by arrangements within the school site, as well as by management, colleagues and professional learning practices. The projects carried out by school librarians that employ norm critical perspectives are both strengthened and challenged by collaboration with principals and other education professionals at the school site. When teachers challenge the views of librarians, the latter have to re-think and re-negotiate normative positions. Hence, norm critical thinking is not only taught but also practiced in the everyday work in school libraries. This article argues that these norm critical perspectives and the librarians' practices represent important contributions to the democratic assignment of Swedish schools.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; education; democracy; gender; LGBTQ+; Scandinavia; norm critique; sexuality; school librarian; Sweden; theory of practice architectures

1. Introduction

One of the core tasks carried out at schools in contemporary Western societies is fostering and educating students in critical thinking, democracy and citizenship. Previous research has explored the democratic mission in education, often focusing on the practices of teachers (e.g., Biesta, 2011; Grannäs, 2011; Hakvoort & Olsson, 2014; Mooney Simmie & Edling, 2019). However, in this article we highlight the activities of another profession that can play an important role for the democratic mission: the school librarian. We explore how school librarians talk about and describe their work to foster norm critical thinking with a specific focus on the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning and others) experience, gender and sexuality. Teaching students to think critically and develop the ability to assume critical dispositions in education and society is recognized as a mandate for schools and school libraries (Mahon et al., 2018). Critical thinking or, as Dewey (1910) refers to it, *reflective thinking,* has been discussed for centuries. Dewey defines reflective thinking as:

> (a) a state of perplexity, hesitation, doubt; and (b) an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief (Dewey, 1910, p. 9).

Following Dewey, in this article we emphasize critical thinking as crucial for, and in, democratic education and society. We understand school librarians work with norm critical perspectives, gender, sexuality and LGBTQ+ issues as part of the democratic mission in the Swedish school.

Despite the specific national context of this article, it has a Scandinavian as well as an international resonance because democracy as an educational aim is increasingly challenged and/or under threat in several parts of the world today (Ricci, 2020). The UNESCO school library manifesto, which is an international qualitative standard for the universal provision of school libraries, underlines the importance of the role of school librarians for supporting and teaching democracy and critical perspectives within schools (IFLA/UNESCO, 1999).

As the norm critical scholar Jannick Friis Christensen describes, norm critique "is to be critical of social norms and the normative spaces they give shape to" (2020, p. 60). According to Christensen, this entails understanding what norms are and how they work. Christensen goes on to argue that "to *do* norm critique is to denaturalize norms by explicating them, by interrupting their repetitions, and by demonstrating their contingency" (2020, p. 60). The concept of norm critique entails methods and theories that are used when working against discriminations and exclusions. There is also a strong connection between norm critique and LGBTQ+ communities, a cornerstone of which is their questioning of heteronormativity. Norm critical pedagogy combines feminist, queer and intersectional theories as well as critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 1972).

Norm critique is an important aspect of critical thinking and is included in the critical pedagogic approach employed in Sweden. The concept of norm critique is distinctively Scandinavian (the word 'normkritik' being used in Sweden, Norway and Denmark synonymously). Norm critique is regarded as a practice, a pedagogy and/or a discourse (Bromseth & Darj, 2010). As such, Swedish educators are encouraged to engage in norm critique. Authorities like the Swedish National Agency for Education [*Skolverket* in Swedish] highlight the importance of, and provide schools with, literature on how to work with norm critique (e.g., Åkesson, 2016). In addition, norm critical teaching resources such as literature, films and other materials have also been created for educators to use in teaching (e.g., Brade, 2008; Svaleryd & Hjertson, 2012; Åkesson, 2016). These materials often focus on the intersections of gender, sexuality and the LGBTQ+ experience. Providing students with LGBTQ+ positive and inclusive literature, materials and information is a common way for schools to support LGBTQ+ students and to demystify this experience for their heteronormative peers. Although such a

broad range of materials about employing norm critique have been created, there is still a lack of research, especially in a Swedish context, that explores how norm critique is enacted and expressed within school libraries.

This article explores how school librarians talk about and describe their work to foster norm critical thinking with a specific focus on LGBTQ+, gender and sexuality. The aim is to contribute examples of how work with norm critique as a part of the schools' democratic assignment is enacted, enabled, and constrained in school libraries. We adopoted the theory of practice architectures as a theoretical and analytical lens (Kemmis & Grootenoboer, 2008; Mahon et al., 2017). This theory emphasizes that sayings, doings and 'relatings', 'hang together' in characteristic and distinctive 'projects' (Kemmis et al., 2014). Although the school library and its librarians can engage in various practices with different purposes (projects), here we specifically study the project of norm critique and how it is enacted in librarian practices. The following research questions guide the article:

- What enables and constrains school librarian practices aimed at developing norm critical thinking?
- How is the project of norm critique enacted in school librarian practices?

We also discuss the role of librarian practices as part of the democratic assignment in contemporary schools.

To build on this introduction, the article is presented in five parts, starting with a short literature review contextualizing school library and librarian practices. This is followed by theory, method, and results, which are presented as a 'fictional narrative' in one school. The article ends with a concluding discussion on the conditions for school librarians' work with norm critique in Swedish school libraries.

2. Contextualizing School Library and Librarian Practices

In Sweden, school libraries are guided by the Library Act (SFS, 2013:801), the Education Act (SFS, 2010:800) and curriculums as well as municipal and local policies and guiding documents. Optimally, school library activities should exist in all Swedish schools. In practice, the resources and management of Swedish secondary and upper secondary school libraries vary to a great extent between schools and municipalities (Gärdén, 2017). Previous international research illustrates the important role that the school library can play in students' development of a variety of critical literacies and independent learning skills (e.g., Bikos, Papadimitriou & Giannakopoulos, 2014; Kaplan, 2010; Lance & Kachel, 2018). School librarians generally describe their libraries as informal, safe spaces for students who may suffer from exclusion for a variety of reasons (e.g., Bannister, 2020). The conceptualization of the library as a safe space has previously been explored and problematized specifically in relation to LGBTQ+ user groups (Vaillancourt, 2013; Mehra & Gray, 2014; Oltmann 2016; Wexelbaum, 2016, 2018).

Previous studies have noted that school librarians play an important, yet often invisible or marginalized, social supportive role for students (Hartzell, 1997; Lawton, 2015; Sacco Ritchie, 2011). School librarians define their core contribution to students in terms of overall support for learning, one-to-one support, and the maintenance of a secure and safe environment (Shaper & Streatfield, 2012). This kind of support has been identified as a third strand of the school librarian profession (Shaper & Streatfield, 2012, p. 74). Further, school librarians emphasize service, integrity, equal access, trusteeship and intellectual freedom as the most important values and ethical principles for school librarianship (Foster & McMenemy, 2012). The integration of librarian practices in classroom teaching is negotiated in each school between librarians, teachers, management, and students. In Sweden, it is most common for school librarians to work mostly on their own which usually mean having autonomy and a great deal of independence in their practices.

2.1 The democratic assignment and LGBTQ+ at the school library

The UNESCO school library manifesto states that the major assignment of school libraries is to ensure intellectual freedom and providing access to information (UNESCO/IFLA, 1999). This is an essential prerequisite for enabling effective, responsible citizenship and participation in a democracy. Further, the manifesto emphasizes equal services to all members of the school community (UNESCO/IFLA, 1999). Traditionally, school libraries promote civic information literacy to inform and prepare young people to act as democratic citizens; in other words, they work with "the civic mission of school libraries" (Kranich, 2006, pp. 10-17). The literature explores and develops various critical perspectives on the educational practices of librarians, and on the intersections of critical pedagogy and library instruction (e.g., Accardi, Drabinski & Kumbier, 2010 Beilin, 2016; Farmer, 2009; Gibson, 2006; Subramaniam, Oxley & Kodama, 2013; Tewell, 2018).

Previous studies with a focus on LGBTQ+ collections and youth have largely been conducted in the United States (Hughes-Hassell, Overberg & Harris, 2013; Oltmann, 2015, 2016; Williams & Deyoe 2015). Some of these studies explore school library work in relation to the LGBTQ+ community. Oltmann (2016) examined the perspective of school librarians on creating LGBTQ+ media collections and found a generally strong support for this work. The librarians in Oltmann's study discussed LGBTQ+ work as a service to society, emphasizing the importance of offering resources to all students and meeting the needs of diverse students (Oltmann, 2016). In addition, there are studies with a focus on how public and school libraries meet the needs of LGBTQ+ youth , and how to incorporate LGBTQ+ focused instruction into the academic preparation of school librarians (Clyde & Lobban, 2001; Knapp 2022; Sturge 2021). In a Swedish context however, there is a lack of research on LGBTQ+ and other marginalized user groups in school libraries.

3. A theory of practice architecture approach

Various practice approaches have been used in library and information science research (Pilerot et al., 2017), as well as in research studies within education (Mahon et al., 2017). We employ the theory of practice architectures in this article to understand how norm critique is enacted in school library practices, to trace enabling and constraining arrangements (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) and to reveal how librarian practices with the specific aim of developing norm critical thinking relate to other practices (Kemmis et al., 2014). Practices such as teaching, professional development, leading, researching, and facilitating student learning within a school site are all connected: they can both constrain and enable each other (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017).

A practice is constituted by specific sayings, doings and relatings that hang together in a distinctive project - the aim/purpose of the practice - (Kemmis et al., 2014) in a certain time and place (Schatzki, 2002). Practices are preconditioned (or 'prefigured' as Schatzki [2002] puts it), by *cultural-discursive*, *material-economic*, and *social-political arrangements*; the practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). Arrangements and practices within schools are enmeshed with and can be traced to the society in which they are embedded, and are manifested, for instance, in policies and laws. Analytically, it is possible to separate arrangements to reveal how they might be changed or adapted (c.f. Mahon et al., 2017). As an example, one can analytically focus the cultural-discursive arrangements that enable and constrain what is currently possible to say about gender- and sexuality-focused projects in Swedish schools. Hence, the rhetoric around equality might be found both in policies as well as in the sayings in (or about) school practices. In Sweden today, homosexuality is no longer considered or talked about as a disease as it was 50 years ago. In the physical space, material-economic arrangements, such as staffing or media budget, enable and constrain what is possible to do in a library practice. The analytical focus is in other words on the 'doings' and what might enable (or constrain) peoples doings. Finally, the social-political arrangements enable and constrain relations amongst people in a practice like school staff and students. The analytical gaze is on how power and

solidarity is enacted. When teachers and librarians, for example, plan joint work, their practices are not only connected but might become a (new) collaborative teaching and learning practice enabled by the social-political arrangements of the site in which they are embedded. However, arrangements are entangled and only analytically separable. Both social-political and cultural-discursive arrangements are inbuilt traditions of the school, which enable or constrain all school practices.

Although we do not study the actual 'happeningness' (Mahon et al., 2017, p. 9) of librarian practices (that is, practices as they happen), the theory of practice architectures can be used as a methodological and analytical resource (Mahon et al., 2017), when analysing the librarians' talk about and reflections on their practices, as explicated in the upcoming section.

4. Data, selection, analyses, methodological and ethical considerations

This article reports parts of a PhD project wherein the empirical data was produced using ethnographic methods such as field notes from observations in schools and interviews with librarians. In the main project, 22 school librarians working in 14 Swedish school libraries were selected for semi-structured interviews, conducted in 2015. The librarians worked at schools that had been awarded prizes from the DIK, the Swedish librarian trade union for best-practices and well-functioning, successful libraries. The awards are primarily based on staffing, media budgets, the quality of collaboration with teachers and management support (DIK, 2022). Out of the 22 librarians interviewed in the PhD-project, eight librarians reported a particular interest and knowledge about issues concerning their democratic assignment and norms. Transcriptions from audio-recorded interviews with these eight librarians, working at four different secondary and upper-secondary schools in various parts of Sweden forms the empirical material for this article. The article was translated from Swedish to English by the authors. The semi-structured interviews lasted for 40 to 90 minutes and were guided by a pre-constructed, thematically designed manual. The character of co-construction in the interviews enabled the interviewing researcher to use personal professional experiences as a school-librarian. The study followed the research ethical principles developed by the Swedish Research Council (2017).

The library resources of the schools examined in this article are unusual in that they have at least one full time librarian each and well-equipped libraries. In addition, this selection represents circumstances where the school has tried to develop their school libraries and to employ professionally trained librarians, circumstances which are certainly not common in Sweden. The resources and support for the school libraries in this study were extraordinary compared to many other schools in Sweden (schools without libraries and/or librarians). This implies that the school library projects presented here cannot be assumed to take place at Swedish schools in general. Echoing conclusions in Kemmis & Grootenboer (2008), the material-economic arrangements in these school sites indeed enabled the librarian practices.

We adopted a case study approach to examine how work with norm critique in school librarian practices is enacted, enabled, and constrained. Yin (1981, p. 98) states that case studies can be used when "an empirical inquiry must examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". The analysis was conducted in several steps to categorize and link ideas. First, we read the transcripts separately. Guided by the theory of practice architectures, we underlined enabling and/or constraining arrangements in the librarians' descriptions prefiguring (Schatzki, 2002) the librarians' practices and the norm critical project. By using the theoretical concepts, we traced the practices and arrangements that either challenged librarian practices or held the practices in place (Mahon et al. 2017). Finally, we compared and discussed the findings in each transcript to get a deeper understanding of the empiric material.

Despite a few site-specific circumstances, we found so many similarities between the four schools and in the architectures of library practices that we decided to present the results as coming from one (fictional) school – *Magnolia School*. An important reason for this coalescence of the four schools in this article is the ethical responsibility to protect the anonymity of our study participants so that they cannot be identified in this presentation of the material. The Swedish school library community is small and participants in the community might recognize themselves or others. Hence, the eight interviewees are amalgamated into two fictional school librarians and are assigned the fictional names Max and Riley.

5. **Results**

The findings are partly presented in two 'scenes' in Magnolia School to highlight the results and frame the discussion. With inspiration from Langelotz & Mahon (2021), this "composite narrative" strategy (Willis, 2018), allowed us to dramatize how the conversations at the school may have played out without revealing the identity of our interviewees (Piper & Sikes, 2010). Although the scenes and Magnolia School are fictional, the narrative and the descriptions of the practices are based directly on field notes and the librarians' reflections and descriptions of their practices in the interviews. The quotes presented as those given by Max and Riley are taken directly from the stories and descriptions in the interviews and are translated by the authors from Swedish to English. The translations are literal as far as possible. The quote given by the principal is based on the descriptions of how supportive school management acted as described by respondents in the interviews. The quoted blogpost is a translation from Swedish to English from a webpage hosted by one of the schools that participated in the study.

5.1 *Joint school themes and professional learning prefigure the norm critical project*
At Magnolia School, where Max and Riley work as librarians, a 'joint school theme' has been dedicated to specific curriculum goals over the past school year. Such themes can either be proposed by teachers, other staff members or by the management team and are negotiated in staff meetings. The common school theme over the last year focused on the LGBTQ+ experience and gender. In classrooms, the library, and in 'school-happenings' like exhibitions, LGBTQ+ and gender issues were focused on and problematized. Shared projects encouraged the staff to collaborate across subjects and professions. In this way, the school's traditions enable democratic actions, such as negotiations and collaborations among the staff, to influence the content and agenda of the academic year. The collaborative practices (meetings and teaching) and the LGBTQ+ and gender theme deepened Riley's interest in learning more about norm critique. In the following quote, Riley also highlights the lack of insights displayed by other adults regarding their own preconceived notions, which provoked Riley to continue the work.

> Riley: I've talked to people my age and adults in the school who are unbelievably certain in their belief that they don't have any prejudices. I feel I would like to highlight various norms since we had this theme last year, and we still do: a[n] LGBTQ+ and gender theme.

Given this interest, Riley found a course called "The norm-aware school library" offered by the municipality. Together with another teacher from Magnolia School, Riley attended the course. One of the other librarians, Max, participated in a one-day conference focusing on the LGBTQ+ experience, which gave rise to new ideas and ambitions to work with LGBTQ+ issues.

5.1.1 Scene 1: Implementing a new project – changing practices
The first scene takes place in the library after the librarians have taken part in the respective professional learning activities: the course and the conference. The library at Magnolia School is centrally located in the school building. Students and staff pass by daily and often stay for a chat with the librarians. There are spaces for reading and studying combined with bookshelves and an open

floor plan, making the library a bright and welcoming space. Today the library is closed for an hour as Max and Riley attend a meeting at the principal's office. The librarians and the principal discuss how to benefit from the librarians' ongoing professional learning on norm critical perspectives and the LGBTQ+ experience. The librarians have an agenda: to make the library more inclusive, and to further contribute to the implementation of LGBTQ+-focused norm critique project in the school.

> Riley: We've talked a lot about norms and especially LGBTQ+ as it's been a huge interest in the library community. And after taking part in these two fantastic educational opportunities, we decided that we want the LGBTQ+ experience to be a prioritized goal for us next year.

> The principal: And in what ways are you planning to implement this in the school library?

> Riley: We're talking about adding the word 'inclusive' to the school library plan. So that that is a prioritized goal for us.

> The principal: And how would you say that word reflects your work?

> Riley: The library should be a place for everyone! And that might also include people who are not privileged. It is, after all, a democratic right to be here. Hence, [the library] must be a place that is inclusive. So, it would mean that we would have a new aim in the school library plan; to be an inclusive and cultural meeting place. Previously we just used the phrase 'cultural meeting place'. But now we would like to add 'inclusive' to that.

> Max: After the conference, I am inspired to focus our norm critical projects on LGBTQ+-related issues. We're thinking of making the work focused on the LGBTQ+ community into a specific aim of our work next year. You know, these issues are widely discussed in the librarian community and have been for a few years now. It's common now to focus on LGBTQ+ people as a specific user group in libraries.

> The principal: Okay, and do you have any suggestions on how to work with this in a practical way?

> Max: I'm thinking of giving the Rainbow shelf some extra attention. I like this kind of arrangement where the LGBTQ+ shelf is a sort of floating exhibition. I'm creating a reading list to place on the shelf. Students can approach it and check it out, it's visible, it's attention-grabbing, although it's not only 'here are these books', one can also just read the list and get inspired and curious.

In this first scene, various practices – of professional learning, the meeting practice, and the management/leading practice – enable the development of the norm critique project. For example, the practice of attending professional learning conferences or courses gives the librarians (collectively and individually) new ideas on how to conduct library work with norm critical thinking and LGBTQ+ issues in focus. In addition, the scene demonstrates how the principal encourages the librarians to describe *how* the changes are to be realized. The librarians' participation in continuing professional learning (CPL), their own reflections, as well as the leadership practice of facilitating change by encouraging real actions (Principal: *Okey, and do you have any suggestions on how to work with this in a practical way?),* contributed to real changes in practice; new wording (sayings) in local policy documents and changes in the librarians' everyday activities and placement and displays of books (doings). In other words, practices such as leadership and professional learning nurture the librarians'' practices aiming at facilitating critical thinking and learning about norm critique. Furthermore, cultural-discursive arrangements beyond the school site play a role here. Both Max and Riley refer to the community of public s and how the importance of paying attention to LGBTQ+ youth (as a specific library user group) had been emphasized there recently. The practices librarians engage in at the

Magnolia School can be seen as related to and preconditioned by librarian traditions beyond the school.

Before we present scene two and the next theme, we need to contextualize parts of the results from scene one in a librarian tradition. In the interviews conducted as part of this study, the terms 'selecting', 'purchasing', 'promoting', 'placing', 'special/break out shelf' and 'fronting' recur. These terms are well known in the librarian community and concern literature promotion in the library. For quite some years, the school library at Magnolia School had a shelf solely devoted to books with LGBTQ+-connotations; the 'Rainbow shelf'. This type of object – a shelf especially devoted to a theme – is a common way of increasing the visibility of literature for children and young adults. The issue raised by the interviewees, whether to distinguish books within certain themes through so called 'break out' shelves or sections of a library, reveals a well-established dilemma in library work. For instance, in the case of youth literature, librarians tend to hesitate about pointing out specific groups rather than letting the literature find its readers (see Clyde & Lobban, 2001). A compromise might be to place books on multiple shelves – that is, on the regular shelf and on the breakout shelf – or to label books with stickers with comments on content ('pinning'), or to provide lists of books within the theme adjacent to the shelf. The latter was the option Max chose and mentioned in the meeting presented in scene one above.

5.2 Challenging the norm critical project
The professional learning course encouraged the participants to critically examine their own library work. Together with the other librarians at Magnolia School, Riley started to critically scrutinize their work in selecting, purchasing, and promoting literature. The selection process is reflected upon in collaborative work on the book *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James (2012). Some have argued that the book, which was originally written by James as *Twilight* fanfiction, eroticizes violence against women (Dines, 2014). It was also one of the best-selling books of the decade. At the time of its release, the book was given substantial attention in Swedish media for the portrayal of the female protagonist, the male antagonist, and their heterosexual relationship.

At Magnolia School, the librarians were hesitant to acquire *Fifty Shades of Grey* given this debate. Nevertheless, they decided to read the book and discuss it together before making the decision. To encourage a discussion at the school, the librarians blogged about the book on the school library homepage.

> After watching the writer E.L. James on TV, reading articles about the book, and reading Fifty Shades of Grey, we at the Magnolia School library are not eager to lend out this book. It is exceptionally misogynist. But, since the students are asking, asking, asking for it, and after many discussions, we librarians have decided that James' book will have a place at the library. However, as we would like our students to note the downside of this popular book, we will place it together with an exhibition on gender roles and men's violence against women. (Quote from blogpost from 2015. Translated from Swedish to English by the authors.)

The critical reflections of the librarians about their own practice resulted in a range of activities (doings). First, they purchased the book to meet the students' requests. Initially this may seem inconsistent with the views expressed after their own reading of the text. However, since there is a strong discourse of non-censorship within the librarian community (Downey, 2013; Nye & Barco, 2012; Pierce, 2015) the librarians at Magnolia instead wanted to give the students the opportunity to read the book for themselves while framing it in a critical context. Here, the librarians emphasize their discussions with students as important. In addition, there exists a discourse regarding student participation in the development of school library holdings. In other words, two professional traditions – non-censorship and participation – have significant impact on decisions about acquiring books.

In the blog post, the librarians criticized the book for being "exceptionally misogynist". To some extent, these opinions about the book reflect how it was received and reviewed in the Swedish media (cf. Brors, 2012). The librarians drew their students' attention to the downside of the book and explained their plan for an exhibition on men's violence against women. When critically examining their work, the librarians used the knowledge and concepts gained from their continuing professional education. By examining their practices of selecting library books, they discovered weaknesses, which prompted actions. Likewise, the students' opportunities to influence the choice of media transforms democracy from a topic of discussion in school sites to a practice that can be enacted.

The blog post enhanced the librarians' feeling of "being critical" as they put it, which is mentioned together with being a 'good' librarian in several of the interviews. The librarians' actions could be interpreted as taking a critical stance towards literature that eroticized violent sexual behaviour and depicted sexual inequality. But the way the book was displayed and promoted in the blog post provoked reactions among staff and students at Magnolia. In the following scene, these tensions are explored.

5.2.1 Scene 2: Tensions between professionals

Max and Riley are early at work, standing next to the Rainbow shelf and engaged in a quiet conversation. Nearby, a teacher explores the literature placed next to the library's copy of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which, as describe in the blogpost above, was placed on a display together with books on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues (SRHR), sexual education, dysfunctional relationships, violence in love relationships, et cetera. A teacher interrupts the librarians, holding up a copy of *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

> Teacher: Hi, just wondered... why have you placed this novel with the SRHR display?
>
> Riley: Well, we discussed the book after reading it and we all think it's problematic, and portrays very unhealthy values and norms. We don't think this book portrays women and their romantic relationships in a very good way.
>
> Teacher: But who are you to decide which sexual interests and activities our students have? I think you are being too moralizing...
>
> Riley: You know that I don't think it's our place to act like a morality police or something. We used our new insights in norm critical perspectives to reflect upon... well, we think the book is problematic and, well, then we had to act.... We hope this exhibition encourages people to form their own opinions despite the book being so popular. We have that kind of mandate in the library, as you know.
>
> Teacher: But when you place the book among books about men's violence against women, you send the message that it's somehow wrong to like this book. You rub it in our – or the students' – faces that the book may not depict an equal sexual relationship! Just like your blog post.
>
> Max: Yes, you are right, but still we felt that we needed to take a critical perspective…. And, well, as Riley just said, we have such a mandate to do that.

The discussion between Max and Riley and the teacher, wherein the teacher challenges and is challenged by the librarians' actions concerning *Fifty Shades of Grey*, shows how they are all (more or less) okey with a non-consensus conversation. They all stay in the awkward zone, trying to read each other's intentions. Riley has explicit views on the book: "very unhealthy values and norms*".* The librarians seem to have enough trust in their relationship to share different opinions. Frictions and

tensions between practices and professions are always present at the school site and contribute to and affect practices (Langelotz, 2017; Sjølie, Francisco & Langelotz, 2019). However, when they tried to act critically, the librarians ran the risk of creating exclusion or alienation and reproducing stereotyped notions. The position of the librarians who criticized the book and decided to place it in the context of SRHR is rooted both in their belief that it is problematic and in the importance of providing different points of view through which students can form their own opinions. However, when the librarians attempt to foster norm critical thinking, they simultaneously adopt an exclusionary or discerning practice when directing students with experiences of or interest in norm-breaking sexual practices towards issues of SRHR. This discerning or distinguishing practice highlights how educators risk discriminating groups of students while trying to integrate norm critical pedagogies into their practices (cf. Reimers, 2008).

6. Concluding discussion

In times when democracy is under threat education and the democratic mission of schools are more crucial than ever. In this article, we argue that school librarian practices aimed at enhancing norm critical thinking might have a significant contribution to a school and society where critical thinking, democracy and citizenship is enacted. By examining school librarian practices such as the selecting, displaying, and promoting of literature we can gain a glimpse of how the practices can be deliberately designed and adopted to change the sayings, doings and relatings of students (and teachers and librarians) towards a more just and equal society. The critical reflexiveness of school librarians thus becomes a fundamental part of the democratic mandate in schools. Based on the empirical data discussed above, we argue that currently, school librarian practices (or lack thereof) have an impact on critical educational practices in Swedish schools. In the light of the theory of practice architectures we will here further discuss the results, with a specific focus on the conditions and enactment of the practices and make a few concluding remarks.

6.1 Conditions that enable and constrain school librarian practices aimed at developing norm critical thinking

When policy documents, regulations and recommendations change, they give rise to new purposes and tasks for education and schooling. When norm critical perspectives are proposed by the authorities, as they are in Sweden, they (may) have an impact on educational practices. Further, LGBTQ+ issues have been raised over time in the library, as well as in school communities (see Hughes-Hassell, Overberg & Harris, 2013; Oltmann, 2015, 2016; Williams & Deyoe, 2015). Kemmis et al. (2014) argue that if new forms in education are to survive over time, they need support (i.e., enabling arrangements). However, many schools in Sweden lack educated librarians and functional libraries.

The librarian practices, in the four upper secondary schools in this study, were developed in sites with nurturing material-economic, cultural-discursive, and social-political arrangements such as appropriate premises, staffing, curriculums, and policies as well as enabling leadership practices. The librarians' everyday practices combined with norm critical work became important for local policy, and the librarians could link the school's democratic mission with their own interest in, for example, LGBTQ+ issues and anti-discrimination. The implementation of norm critical perspectives in school librarian practices was enabled by the management and the librarians' positions close to management. Support is a major facet in the success of school librarian implementation in the other teaching practices of the school (c.f. Bikos, Papadimitriou & Giannakopoulos, 2014; Francis, Lance & Lietzau, 2010; Haycock, 2011; Centerwall, 2022). The norm critical projects that the schools in this study carried out took place in Sweden after the national, regional and local elections in 2014, when issues of gender equality, ethnicity and immigration were widely discussed (Berg & Oscarsson, 2015). Political and educational discourses in society enabled the local LGBTQ+ work. In the two scenes presented above, it is also apparent that the possibility to conduct norm critical work was enabled (and constrained) by the conditions within the school library settings, the practices at the specific site,

together with the librarians' agency and ability to reflect upon their work. When a school has facilities like a school library with professional librarians (which is not always the case in Swedish schools), librarian practices are indeed part of educational practices, enmeshed with other core practices (like teaching, learning, leading, professional development and researching (cf. Kemmis et al., 2014)). The practice architectures that promote and enable work with norm critical perspectives in these cases, were, so to speak, in place. Thus, the various arrangements supported norm critical projects in a synchronized way and therefore made them possible.

6.2 The projects of norm critique enacted in school librarian practices
The upper secondary schools reported on in this article had ongoing gender, LGBTQ+ or norm critical educational projects, which implies that the interest in these topics extended beyond the librarians to the wider school community. Considering concepts from the theory of practice architectures, this could be interpreted as both cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements that enabled and, indeed, challenged practices at the schools. The norm critical projects were negotiated in tensions between the conditions, the goals of education and the more personal goals and beliefs of librarians and teachers. The tensions between librarians and teachers prompted the initiative to use norm critical perspectives to challenge the perceptions of colleagues and students.

The tensions associated with promoting books and specific reading versus allowing students experience a high degree of integrity and freedom of choice are always a concern in librarianship. Reflecting on collections and promoting and arranging books are part of everyday school library work. Likewise, when school librarians employ norm critical perspectives, they can encourage students to question preconceived biases and develop more nuanced opinions based on exposure to a broad range of texts and ideas. However, our empirical data did not indicate any signs of criticism towards norm critique. Simply put, older and institutionalized materials were questioned and criticized while norm critical ideas and materials were brought forward as good, refreshing, or non-biased. The decisions made with the intention of being norm critical were for example perceived by teachers as being overly moralistic. The project on norm critique and the tensions it contributed to among the teaching staff were nevertheless acknowledged and reflected upon by the librarians in our empirical data. This example demonstrates the complexity of enacting critical education and how, according to Dewey (1910), critical thinking always requires "perplexity, hesitation, doubt" (p. 9).

Framing the librarian as an ally to LGBTQ+ students connect to the schools' work in countering discrimination and heteronormativity. The example with the Rainbow shelf could be interpreted in a similar way. The shelf, along with other LGBTQ+ symbols such as the rainbow flag, plays a role as a symbol or marker of the LGBTQ+ youth community, making it easier for users to find the collection. Creating LGBTQ+ symbols such as the Rainbow shelf and positioning themselves as allies through inclusive language and attitudes towards students are fundamental ways for the library to be seen as a safe space. Positioning LGBTQ+ as an umbrella concept enabled reflection on the reading habits and preferences of genders, gender identities and sexual identities. However, in making visible certain dimensions in the LGBTQ+ concepts, others became invisible.

6.3 Future research
The examples discussed in this article mainly revolve around gender and sexuality and their intersections. These aspects are common choices when engaging in norm critical perspectives, among teachers (c.f. Martinsson & Reimers, 2020) as well as among school librarians (Centerwall, 2022). Using the intersections of gender and sexuality as dimensions of power and as bases for discrimination enables work around issues of LGBTQ+ without having to clarify or truly understand the complexities in sexuality (LGB) and gender (TQ). In the examples provided above, queer and trans issues are absent, while the focus lies solely on sexuality. Consequently, there is progress to be made,

and further research is needed to explore how queer and trans issues play out in schools and in the everyday practices of school librarians.

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