

**USING MEMES IN FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY
SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSES: A MATERIAL PACKAGE
FOR MULTILITERACY PEDAGOGY**

Anni Tolonen

Master's Thesis

English

Department of Language and
Communication Studies

University of Jyväskylä

November 2023

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Author Anni Tolonen	
Title Using memes in Finnish upper secondary school English classes: A material package for multiliteracy pedagogy	
Subject Englannin kieli	Level Pro gradu -tutkielma
Month and year Marraskuu 2023	Number of pages 39 + liite (33 sivua)
<p>Abstract</p> <p>Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteiden laaja-alaisen osaamisen osa-alueissa mainitaan monilukutaito (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet, 2019). Monilukutaito on alun perin <i>The New London Groupin</i> (Cazden ym., 1996) kehittämä termi, joka tarkoittaa kykyä lukea, analysoida ja tuottaa laaja-alaisen tekstikäsitteiden mukaisia tekstejä. Yksi nykyaikana yleinen tekstilaji, jonka tulkitsemisessa monilukutaitoa tarvitaan, ovat meemit. Meemit ovat pääasiassa internetissä leviäviä hauskoja kuvia ja videoita, joita internetin käyttäjät imitoivat sekä uudelleenmiksaavat. Huumori on usein yksi meemien pääpiirteistä, mutta lisäksi niillä voidaan vaikuttaa muun muassa ihmisten mielipiteisiin, politiikkaan sekä mainontaan. Meemeillä voidaan myös levittää propagandaa sekä valetietoa, minkä takia niitä tulisi osata kriittisesti tulkita ja analysoida.</p> <p>Suomalaiset nuoret viettävät runsaasti aikaa internetissä ja sosiaalisessa mediassa, usein kuluttaen englanninkielistä mediaa. Tästä syystä kriittistä medianlukutaitoa on tärkeää oppia myös englannin kielen kontekstissa. Lukion englannin oppikirjoissa on alettu viime vuosina käsitellä sosiaalista mediaa ja siellä vaikuttamista, mutta meemejä ei näissä kirjoissa ole vielä käytetty varsinaisina oppimateriaaleina.</p> <p>Suunnittelemani kuuden oppitunnin opetusmateriaalipaketti meemien käytöstä opetuksessa perustuu monilukutaidon pedagogiikkaan. Materiaalipaketti on tarkoitettu käytettäväksi lukion ENA4-moduulissa, joka käsittelee mediaa ja yhteiskunnassa vaikuttamista. Materiaalin tavoitteena on, että oppilaat oppivat ymmärtämään, kriittisesti analysoimaan sekä luomaan meemejä, samalla monipuolisesti eri kielitaidon osa-alueita harjoittaen. Lukiolaiset valikoituivat kohderyhmäksi, koska heidän kielitaitonsa on sopivalla tasolla opiskeltavaa materiaalia ajatellen, ja koska ENA4-moduulin teemat ovat aiheeseen hyvin sopivat. Lopputuloksena on ajankohtainen, oppilaille innostava ja mielenkiintoinen, sekä toiminnallinen materiaalipaketti, jota voi muokata monille eri ikäryhmille ja kielitasoille sopivaksi.</p>	
Keywords: Multiliteracies, memes, material package, EFL	
Depository: University of Jyväskylä	
Additional information	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	MULTILITERACIES	4
	2.1 Multiliteracies in the National Core Curriculum	7
3	MEMES.....	10
	3.1 The definition of memes	10
	3.2 Memes on online platforms	12
	3.3 The social impact of memes.....	14
	3.4 Previous research on using memes in teaching.....	17
4	ABOUT THE MATERIAL PACKAGE.....	22
	4.1 Aim and theoretical framework of the material package.....	23
	4.2 Target group and module	28
	4.3 Examples of task types.....	29
	4.3.1 Vocabulary tasks	29
	4.3.2 Group tasks/discussions	30
	4.3.3 Online games.....	31
5	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	32
	REFERENCES	37

APPENDICES – MATERIAL PACKAGE

FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Knowledge Processes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015).	6
FIGURE 2	Examples of Knowledge Processes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015).	24

TABLES

TABLE 1	The course description of ENA4 module (LOPS 2019).....	28
---------	--	----

1 INTRODUCTION

Internet memes are “digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form and stance; that were created with awareness of each other; and were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the internet by many users” (Shifman, 2014). Memes may seem like harmless pieces of humor circulating on the internet, but according to Shifman (2014, p. 15), memes “reflect deep social and cultural structures”. Furthermore, according to Wiggibs (2019), memes are, behind the humor, essentially visual arguments that can comment or influence discourses. Despite their seemingly innocent humorous purpose, memes can be harmful by spreading hate speech and misinformation. According to Boyle (2022), the reason why memes are such a potential medium for spreading misinformation is that they can be created by anyone, get significant attention on social media, and eventually it can be impossible to know who the original creator was and where the information in the meme originated. Furthermore, memes have been present in political participation (Heiskanen, 2017), advertising (Wiggibs, 2019), and fighting social injustice (Williams, 2020).

From my own experience, memes are not utilized enough in teaching. I had courses in upper secondary school and university where teachers used memes as a small, fun addition to the teaching slides to make them more humorous. During my teaching practice in the English subject teacher education, students gave me good feedback about using memes in my slides and activities. However, I have never used them as material to be critically analyzed or created in the classroom; the closest to that has been showing examples of memes while teaching a specific grammar topic. My teaching philosophy emphasizes using authentic ‘real-life’ materials, and memes fit that description well. They are often created based on real-life events, are made by real internet users, and they can affect many aspects of society and online communication.

I argue that since memes are so strongly present online, and Finnish youth spend a lot of time on social media (Ebrand Group, 2022) where they most likely encounter memes, they need literacy skills regarding memes. Particularly because memes can potentially affect opinions

and spread misinformation, they need to be used and examined in the educational context properly. Youth need to learn what memes are, how to analyze them critically, and how to be ethical meme creators.

Furthermore, I argue that memes should be utilized in English language classes; a lot of memes on social media are in English, and therefore students need to possess critical reading skills also in English. There have been several small-scale studies conducted about using memes in teaching, but mostly they are articles in which the teaching experimentations have been short (e.g. Elmore & Coleman, 2019; Harvey & Palese, 2018; Purnama, 2017; Sorte & Santos, 2020). Furthermore, I found no material packages or research about teaching with memes in the Finnish context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The only ‘material package’ that I found about teaching about memes in Finland is *Meemikoulu* (Meemikoulu, 2023), which is a blog project that has gathered online learning materials and information about memes, but that is also in Finnish. Therefore, I was encouraged to make a teaching material package that aims to provide Finnish upper secondary English teachers with meme-centered tasks that teach the students to be critical readers and media consumers in English, by drawing on the pedagogy of multiliteracies.

According to the Finnish National Core Curriculum of General Upper Secondary Schools (LOPS 2015), multiliteracies (*monilukutaito*) is based on a broad understanding of texts, and it means the abilities to interpret, examine and create different text types for diverse purposes. Multiliteracies as a term was originally developed by the *New London Group* (Cazden et al., 1996) to further develop the concept of literacy, by recognizing the diversity of different modes of texts, and the growing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world. The main theoretical framework for planning this material package was the pedagogy of multiliteracies, pioneered by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), and further developed by Cope and Kalantzis (2015). The *Knowledge Processes* involved in teaching and learning multiliteracies, formulated by Cope and Kalantzis (2015), provided a suitable basis for planning tasks regarding memes.

The target group of the material package to be presented in this thesis are the students in Finnish upper secondary schools that are learning English as a Foreign Language. The specific target module of the material is the 4th English course of the A-level English, ENA4, that is based on the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary School (LOPS, 2019). The course addresses themes such as media and critical reading skills, so memes, as a significant element of social media, are extremely suitable teaching material for that course. During the use of this material package, students will learn about the history of memes, and their significance in the society today. Moreover, they will learn to analyze topical memes critically, and towards the end of the lessons, to create their own memes. At the end of the course, there will be a lesson in which memes created by them will be introduced to the whole group and discussed together.

The structure of this thesis is the following: At first, multiliteracies and their significance in the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools in Finland are discussed in more detail. After that, memes are discussed thoroughly, including their history, their significance in social matters, and how they have been used in teaching before. Chapter four introduces the material package in more detail, including the aims, the target group, the pedagogical framework, and some example tasks. Finally, there is discussion about the material package and its strengths, weaknesses, and future considerations. The material package can be found as an appendix.

2 MULTILITERACIES

Salomaa and Palsa (2019) state that there are several development trends that need to be considered when planning media education: Firstly, technology has become more advanced and diverse, which can both be useful, and on the other hand enable media manipulation and other negative effects. Secondly, the changing customs of media use, such as the growing role of social media and different ways of using media between generations and people from different cultures needs to be considered. Thirdly, the requirements for media literacy are changing, and other types of literacies, such as critical literacy, digital literacy, data literacy, visual literacy and multiliteracy need to be involved in media education (Salomaa & Palsa, 2019).

The abundance of these possible theories of literacies related to the internet and memes can be confusing, since the definitions of different literacies can be vague and the differences between the theories can be blurry. The theoretical frameworks regarding literacies considered in this thesis are multiliteracies, and as a part of it, critical media literacy. The Finnish term ‘monilukutaito’ which is widely used in the Finnish National Core Curriculums, is based on the term ‘multiliteracies’ coined by the New London Group (Harmanen, 2016, as cited in Palsa, Pekkala & Salomaa, 2019).

The term ‘multiliteracies’ was first coined by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), a group of researchers, when they considered the singular term ‘literacy’ outdated due to the changes in text genres brought by the internet and mass media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). According to them, the term multiliteracies consists of two ‘multi’s: The first ‘multi’ recognises the differences in meaning making due to cultural, social and domain-specific contexts, opposed to just focusing on standard national language. The second ‘multi’ addresses multimodality, which means that in addition to traditional alphabetical forms, texts can also be

visual, oral, gestural, and spatial messages. Furthermore, Cope and Kalantzis (2015) state that these new multimodal texts need to be studied in classrooms.

According to Palsa et al. (2019, p. 44), however, there are several ways to understand the term multiliteracies: It can be understood as a singular literacy, as an umbrella term, as a generic name for several different literacies, or as a type of pedagogy. According to Palsa et al. (2019, p. 44), multiliteracies as *a singular literacy* means that it is one of many literacies – it has its own definition, and it is comparable to other types of literacies. Multiliteracies as *an umbrella term* means that the term includes several literacies, and the different literacies are therefore different sectors of multiliteracies. Multiliteracies as *a generic name for several different literacies* means that singular literacies that are based on the broad definition of text can be seen as multiliteracies (Palsa et al. 2019, p. 44).

According to Palsa et al. (2019 p. 44), the fourth way of defining multiliteracies is multiliteracies as *a pedagogy*. The pedagogy of multiliteracies, pioneered by the New London Group (Cazden et al. 1996) and further developed by Cope and Kalantzis (2015), is the central framework of this thesis. According to the original theory of the New London Group, the primary elements of the pedagogy of multiliteracies were *situated practice, over instruction, critical framing* and *transformed practice* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015); however, Cope and Kalantzis (2015 p. 5) reconsidered and renamed these dimensions into more easily approachable ‘Knowledge processes’; *experiencing, conceptualising, analysing* and *applying*. Cope and Kalantzis (2015, p. 5) state that both sets of terms can exist simultaneously and either terms can be used for classroom activities. Nevertheless, according to Cope and Kalantzis (2015) the core idea is that learning is not linear but happens in a ‘weaving’ motion between the pedagogical processes described in the figure below:

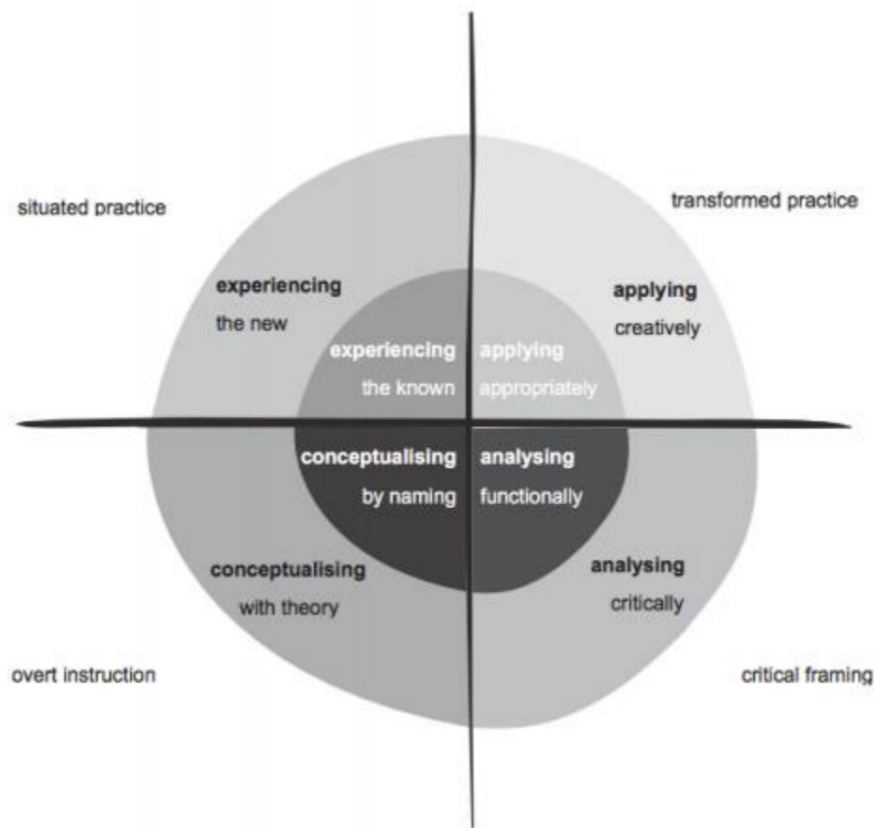


Figure 1 The Knowledge Processes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 5)

Different segments of the figure are the different dimensions and knowledge processes of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, explained in the following way by Cope and Kalantzis (2015): *Situated practice/experiencing* include the notions that knowledge is tied to contexts, and that there are two types of pedagogical weaving happening in regards to experiencing: Between school learning and informal out-of-school learning, and additionally between familiar and unfamiliar texts. *Overt instruction/conceptualizing* mean that knowledge is based on concepts and theories developed by experts, but instead of the teacher just feeding information to the learners, the learners need to become active users and conceptualizers of knowledge themselves. *Critical framing/analysing* emphasize that in order for effective learning to happen, the functions of text and the motives and meanings behind the creation of the text need to be critically analysed by the learners. *Transformed practice/applying* embody the need for

students to apply the knowledge to situations in real life, which in the case of multiliteracies means creating texts themselves for communication. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). These knowledge processes — experiencing, conceptualizing, analysing and applying — are the main basis for planning the activities in this material package. How they were used for planning the material package will be explained in more detail in chapter four.

According to Kupiainen (2019, p. 29), the knowledge processes by Cope and Kalantzis (2015, p. 5) encourage the students' own agency, critical thinking and actively working with texts. However, Kupiainen (2019, p. 29) acknowledges that using new genres of texts at school can be problematic; short lessons, limitations with devices, and the book centrality of schools can cause problems for using or creating videos, for example. Additionally, Kupiainen (2019, p. 30) mentions that for instance copyrights and the ideological choices of the teacher about which texts are appropriate for school use can further limit the material choices for multiliteracies teaching. Kupiainen (2019 p. 30) concludes that in the core of the pedagogy of multiliteracies are agency, communality and influencing, and that by implementing multiliteracies to teaching, it is possible to influence the society and participate in developing a socially better world.

2.1 Multiliteracies in the National Core Curriculum

The most significant documents in planning and implementing education in Finland are the National Core Curriculums. The newest National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education, from now on mostly referred to as NCCGUSE, was published in 2019 (LOPS, 2019), and utilized in teaching by 2021. Curiously, the definition of multiliteracies (*monilukutaito* in Finnish) is not explained in the newest NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019) at all. Perhaps it was assumed by the writers that it does not need to be defined in each National Core Curriculum separately, since in the previous National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools (LOPS 2015) multiliteracies were defined, in the following way: “Multiliteracies mean the skills to interpret, produce and evaluate texts in different forms and contexts. - - Multiliteracies are based on broad understanding of texts, according to which, texts are entities formed by verbal, pictorial, auditory, numeric or kinesthetic symbol systems or their combinations” (LOPS 2015,

p. 38, the author's own translation). It can be assumed that since there is no new definition for multiliteracies in the newer National Core Curriculum (LOPS 2019), the definition is considered the same in the newer one.

Multiliteracies, or environments and methods that can be used in learning multiliteracies, are mentioned in the NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019) several times. Regarding learning environments and methods, it is stated that the students are to use digital learning materials and learning environments independently and in group, practice digital information retrieval critically, and produce and share their own digital materials (LOPS 2019, p. 19). Furthermore, students' understanding of technology should be deepened so that they can utilize it purposefully, ethically, and safely. When stating the general learning goals for students in upper secondary school, the NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019, p. 58) mentions strengthening students' multiliteracies skills; students should explore, understand, analyze and produce different kinds of texts, and implement critical reading skills.

Compared to the previous National Core Curriculum, perhaps the most significant new addition are the transversal competences (LOPS 2019). In the newest NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019) there are six areas of transversal competence listed: well-being competence, interaction skills, multidisciplinary and creative competence, civic skills, ethical and environmental competence, and global and cultural competence. At least three of these competence areas are tightly associated with multiliteracies. One of the sub-areas of multidisciplinary and creative competence is "multiliteracy in the digital era" (LOPS 2019), which is directly at the core of multiliteracies and therefore this thesis. Additionally, one of the sub-areas of societal competence is "democracy skills, influencing for a safe, just and sustainable future" (LOPS 2019), which is strongly related to influencing and participatory culture online. With global and cultural competence, "ethical agency in the globalized spheres of media and technology" is mentioned (LOPS 2019). It is therefore clear that multiliteracies relate very strongly to the transversal competence areas of the curriculum, and therefore the entire upper secondary education; It is mentioned (LOPS 2019, p. 61) that each subject covers the transversal competence areas expediently from the subject's own perspective.

Interestingly, multiliteracies are not mentioned in the NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019) regarding foreign languages teaching nearly as many times as regarding teaching Finnish as the first language. The NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019, p. 174-177) has its own section for the general goals and purposes of foreign language education, where regarding multiliteracies it is only stated that the language education in upper secondary school supports the development of multiliteracy skills, and that the language education is based on a diverse perception of texts: they can be written, spoken, visual, audio-visual or combinations of them. However, even if multiliteracies are not extensively included in the foreign languages section in the curriculum, I argue that they are important in foreign language teaching as well, due to students likely consuming a lot of English-language media.

The teaching material package in this thesis is designed to be used in the 4th English module, ENA4, *English as an instrument for exerting influence* (LOPS, 2019). The description of the course does not specifically mention multiliteracies, even though the course topics of media and influencing are strongly related to multiliteracies. The target module will be introduced in more detail in chapter four.

3 MEMES

3.1 The definition of memes

To discuss memes, it is necessary to acknowledge the origin of the term. A meme has not always meant humorous content, most often videos and images circulating on the internet, which is how the word is often understood nowadays. The concept of “meme” was invented in 1976 by an evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who defined memes as small cultural items, such as melodies, catchphrases, and fashion trends, spreading among people through copying or imitation (Dawkins 2016, p. 249). Additionally, Dawkins (2016, p. 249) draws an analogy between memes and genes; just like genes spread by leaping from one body to another through insemination, memes leap from one brain to another through imitation – and additionally, just like genes, memes are subjected to “natural selection” and mutations in the competition with other memes to survive.

According to Wiggibs (2019), the scholarship on memes is historically largely based on the “epidemiological model”, where another popular biological analogy is that memes are seen to be spread like viruses. However, the meme-as-virus analogy is somewhat problematic; according to both Shifman (2014) and Wiggibs (2019), the virus analogy simplifies the complex human behaviors and ignores the agency of people in spreading memes. Susan Blackmore (as cited in Shifman, 2014, p.12), one of the most well-known researchers of memetics, claims that humans are solely devices used by memes for their spread, therefore not acknowledging humans’ own agency in the process at all. Shifman (2014) states that for understanding internet memes, recognizing the agency of people is in an essential role, especially when meanings are being changed in the memetic process and evolution. Similarly, Wiggibs (2019) states that memes are not merely replicated jokes, but rather visual argumentation.

In everyday discourse today when someone mentions memes, they are most likely referring to internet memes. Internet meme as a concept differs greatly from the original, biology-based definition of a meme, but it is not easier to define. Internet memes are a complicated, ever-changing concept that despite their rather young age has many scholarly definitions already. Shifman (2014) was the first researcher to write an extensive academic book about internet memes, and therefore can be seen as one of the pioneers in the field of internet meme research. Shifman (2014, p. 41) defines internet memes as

“(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which

(b) were created with awareness of each other, and

(c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the internet by many users”

Shifman’s definition acknowledges the characteristics of memes, how they are created, and how they are spread online. In part (a), the content means what is being said or done in the meme, form means how it is presented (for example if it is a video, or how a layout of the image is), and stance means what kind of position the meme takes and what kind of point of view or attitudes are being presented in it. In part (b), Shifman (2014) acknowledges that memes are not created in a meaningless void, but as a form of communication between internet users, often including intertextuality and references to other memes. In part (c), Shifman (2014) states that only sharing a popular video as it is on the internet does not count as a meme, in that case the content is only *viral* - for the image or video to be classified as a meme, it needs to be imitated or remixed, and transformed somehow from its original form by people online.

Shifman wrote their definition of internet memes in 2013, and ten years is a remarkably long time in the constantly changing online world. Therefore, the essence and qualities of memes have changed substantially since that. One of the newer definitions of an internet meme, by

Laineste and Voolaid (2017, p. 27) is the following: “A meme is a relatively complex, multi-layered, and intertextual combination of (moving) image and text that is disseminated by the active agency of internet users, becoming popular among them”. What is significant in Laineste and Voolaid’s (2017) definition is that they emphasize the intertextuality – referring to other, already existing texts – by mentioning it explicitly. Laineste and Voolaid (2017) also acknowledge that memes are complex and there is always active agency behind them.

There is an even newer definition of an internet meme by Wiggibs (2019), according to whom “The internet meme is hereby defined as a remixed, iterated message that can be rapidly diffused by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, or other discursive activity”. Compared to the two earlier definitions, Wiggibs (2019) further emphasizes the deeper significance of memes. Humor is only the superficial aspect of the meme, and there is nearly always an ideology, argument or attitude hidden beneath it (Wiggibs, 2019). This definition also acknowledges the diverse purposes of meme and welcomes a never-ending variety of purposes with stating ‘other discursive activity’. Wiggibs (2019) also states that it would be important to analyze internet memes and the ideologies behind them thoroughly in the today’s world where people tend to avoid long argumentative texts, and instead express as much as possible as effectively as possible, which memes are perfect for.

3.2 Memes on online platforms

It is possible, even extremely likely, to encounter memes on almost any social media platform. Some of the most popular social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, Reddit and Snapchat, are all popular for sharing memes. It is impossible to determine how many memes exist on the internet, since the number is so high and growing continuously, but it can be certainly said that we are discussing enormous numbers. There is a crowdsourced meme database online called KnowYourMeme (KnowYourMeme, 2023), which, according to Boyle (2022) is a commonly referenced, informative and relatively

accurate source for checking backgrounds of memes. KnowYourMeme collects popular meme templates and explains their origins and use, and it consists of more than 8500 confirmed entries at the time of writing, November 2023 (KnowYourMeme, 2023). It is important to acknowledge that these entries are only templates, meaning that there can be hundreds, thousands or even millions of different versions and remixes created from one single meme template. Browsing the remarkable number of entries on KnowYourMeme from the oldest to newest demonstrates the evolution of memes: it is evident how much they have changed in terms of form, content and diversity in approximately two decades.

In the early 2000's, when YouTube was launched, much of memetic context was in form of videos: When a video went viral, a lot of people created their own versions by mimicking or remixing the original video (Shifman, 2014). Shifman (2014) states that also image macros, memes with an image and a caption, have been steadily popular throughout the years. However, even if image-based memes have become popular within the last two decades, videos are still a popular form for memes: One of the most popular social media platforms currently, TikTok, is entirely based on video form. It encourages people to create their own videos, using audios from other users. Some users use encountered audios as they are, but often the audios are being transformed and evolved in the process - they change music genres or become mashups with other songs, just how Shifman (2014) described remixing in the evolution of a meme. According to Zulli and Zulli (2022), the entire TikTok platform has been built to encourage mimesis; there are endless sharing options within the app, and it encourages people to imitate and remix content on the platform. Zulli and Zulli (2022) also stated that there are a significant number of challenge videos, chain videos or duet videos, all of which invite other people to join the trends, therefore taking part in memetic actions.

3.3 The social impact of memes

Memes can impact society in many ways. In this chapter, I will discuss how memes have been present in the last decades in discussions of mental health issues, activism, political participation, and advertisement, among others.

There have been several studies conducted about people with mental health issues and how they perceive memes: According to Akram et al. (2021), people with symptoms of anxiety found memes related to Covid-19 pandemic more humorous, relatable and shareable than their non-anxious counterparts. Additionally, according to Cauberghe et al. (2021), of people experiencing symptoms of anxiety who used social media for coping during the pandemic, those who shared humorous Covid-19 content online were more likely to experience mood increases. Based on these articles by Akram et al. (2021) and Cauberghe et al. (2021), a conclusion can be drawn that for some individuals humorous online content can work as a beneficial coping mechanism that can ease their anxiety in difficult situations. Furthermore, Gardner et. al. (2021) found that looking at memes about depression can potentially be beneficial to depressed individuals; Dark and self-deprecating memes can work as a coping mechanism and allow individuals to connect with other people in the same situation, as well as normalize talking about depression. Kariko and Anasih (2019) conducted a survey to 133 college students, from whom 47% reported that they have had their anxiety attacks and/or depression symptoms eased by looking at memes.

Since the dawn of internet memes, they have been used as a tool of activism and fighting social injustice. According to Williams (2020), the Black Lives Matter movement, which brings attention to racism against black people, is one of the most remarkable examples of social movements that have gathered attention and power on online platforms in order to generate social action. Williams (2020) states that memes can serve as a tool for commentary about racism. Memes such as “BBQ Becky” — which stems from real incidents where white women in the US have harassed black individuals in public spaces in a racist way — have given black meme creators a way to call attention to white people trying to wrongfully regulate black people

in normal everyday situations (Williams, 2020). Furthermore, in addition to creating discussion online by going viral and sparking a remarkable number of remixes, there have been incidents where the people performing racist actions have had actual consequences to their actions such as losing a job (Williams, 2020). This serves as one example how memes can be used powerfully in activism.

Memes are currently used in political participation substantially and have been used for almost two decades now. In the United States, the 2008 election was the first presidential election where memetic online behavior could be seen, and from then on, the memes have only gotten more prevalent and powerful in that context (Shifman 2014). It is positive that they can be used as a discussion tool in politics: according to Shifman (2014), memes can aid political participation by allowing grassroots action, being a great persuasion tool, and help people express themselves and participate in political public discussion. Additionally, Milner (2013, as cited in Tuters & Hagen, 2020) states that more people from different perspectives can join the political discussion and make it more diverse.

However, as a powerful tool of discussion, memes can also cause controversies online regarding political participation: Especially regarding the 2016 presidential election in the US, discussion arose about how greatly online communities and memes can impact political behavior (Heiskanen, 2017). It is naturally impossible to claim that Trump won the election because of memes, but it is justified to state that he gathered a lot of popularity on very meme-centered platforms, such as 4chan and Reddit, especially from people who are not usually involved with politics (Heiskanen, 2017).

Memes, as an aspect of participatory culture, have the power to unite people to fight for good causes such as raising awareness of injustices and give a voice to silenced minorities (Harvey & Palese, 2018). However, Harvey and Palese (2018) note that memes can also unite people for negative causes, including hateful behavior towards certain minority groups, and terrorism. One particularly well-known example of a meme used widely in hateful purposes is the case

of Pepe the Frog: The originally innocent internet meme Pepe the Frog was widely used online in hateful and racist remixes and contexts, often by alt-right nationalists, and this led to Pepe eventually being added to the list of hate symbols by the U.S. Anti-Defamation League (Glitsos & Hall, 2020).

According to Tuters & Hagen (2020), one of the most notorious platforms of the internet when it comes to controversial memes and extreme right-wing politics, an image board called 4chan, is using memetic phenomena directly for racist purposes. They stated that 4chan users use certain memes to create a sense of having ‘us’ and ‘them’, downright othering some minorities and therefore practicing ‘memetic antagonism’ (Tuters & Hagen, 2020). 4chan is notorious for its sense of a circle of insiders - their “memesphere” has become so specific, edgy and ever-changing that the users need to be constantly informed of the new trends and “subcultural bat signals” to be able to understand the newest memes and conversations (Phillips & Milner, 2017, as cited in Tuters & Hagen, 2020). 4chan being a notorious circle of insiders is problematic: for outsiders it can be nearly impossible to enter the discussions and understand the inside jokes and, unfortunately, difficult to recognize hate speech that is being disguised as memes.

Boyle (2022) claims that memes can spread false or misleading information, which has been noticeable online during presidential elections and the Covid-19 pandemic, for example. The information in memes can be entirely false, as in meme templates during presidential campaigns where a meme compares two candidates and their opinion on a specific topic, with entirely imaginary quotes from them (Boyle, 2022). The quotes in these types of memes are often so extremely absurd that likely many people online recognize them as jokes or parody, but it is still unethical to present fake quotes never said by the subjects of the meme, especially since it contains the risk of some people taking them seriously. Furthermore, Boyle (2022) emphasizes that information in memes is not often false, but rather accurate or partly accurate information that is presented in a misleading way. According to Boyle (2022), during the Covid-19 outbreak there were memes especially about medical advice, where the information for example about vaccines was accurate, but represented in a biased way; out of context and without sources, which made them extremely misleading to the reader. Boyle (2022) claims

that librarians should implement memes in their information literacy instruction. Similarly, Ireland (2018) states that fake news are spread via memes and librarians should utilize memes to promote information literacy.

One more area of the society that memes have entered within the last two decades is advertisements, since they have become a commercial tool being used by companies (Wiggibs, 2019). According to Salo (2017), Finnish high school students had difficulties to recognize memes made by companies for commercial purposes: meme advertisements are not very transparent with their commercialism and can be hard to recognize, and that is why students should have tools to recognize which images on the internet are authentic memes from internet users, and which ones are powered by commercial motives.

In conclusion, memes affect surprisingly many aspects of society today, and can have an impact on public discussions, and people's opinions and behavior. Therefore, they cannot be overlooked only as funny nonsense pictures online, but they need to be studied further and incorporated into education in a meaningful way.

3.4 Previous research on using memes in teaching

Just as internet memes are a relatively new phenomenon, subsequently so is using them in the classroom. More extensive studies about using memes in teaching seem to be almost non-existent, but several small-scale studies have been conducted. According to Serano (2018, as cited in Elmore & Coleman, 2019), teachers use memes to announce rules or as a humorous, light addition to classes to increase student engagement. However, in recent years some studies have taken a more thorough and integrating approach to memes, actually using them as data to be analyzed by students. The different studies conducted of using memes in the classroom use different theories of literacy, which reflects how memes are a complicated concept that can be linked to several types of literacies: for example multiliteracies, media literacy, critical literacy,

and even memetic literacy. Some of the approaches taken and studies conducted will now be introduced.

Sorte & Santos (2020) combine multiliteracy perspective and the critical literacy theory in their article about using memes in English classes. They argue that things done in the classroom should be closely related to the real world. They suggest different ways in which political and humorous memes could be used and analyzed in the classroom, and come to the conclusion that the aforementioned memes could spark discussions about the elections, the remixing nature of memes, and societal issues. Furthermore, Sorte and Santos (2020) claim that using memes in classroom demonstrates how people can interpret memes in different ways depending on their perspective. They also argue that it is important that memes are used in teaching appropriately, with a purpose, rather than just for the sake of using them. (Sorte & Santos, 2020)

Purnama (2017) used creating memes about certain health related topics on Instagram as a way to make learning motivating and interesting for Indonesian Health College students, and found that the students indeed enjoyed creating memes more than usual classroom activities. Kayali & Altuntas (2021) used memes as a tool of teaching vocabulary to medicine students in Turkey. The results showed that creating memes using the vocabulary they are attempting to learn enhanced the level of remembering the vocabulary. Kayali & Altuntas (2021) also conducted a feedback questionnaire, in which they found out that students had very positive views of using memes in the classroom. The students thought that making memes was fun, and they remembered the words better after the meme creation, therefore the activity was useful for learning vocabulary (Kayali & Altuntas, 2021).

Elmore & Coleman (2019) used political memes to teach critical media literacy skills to middle school students in the United States. They conducted a two-week teaching unit in which students learned about rhetorical strategies and terms, critical media literacy theory, and memes. Eventually the students conducted a rhetorical analysis of specific memes. The results showed

that the students were able to analyze memes thoroughly, and that they indeed learned more critical media literacy during the research process. (Elmore & Coleman, 2019)

Dominguez Romero and Bobkina (2021) researched the critical and visual literacy skills and needs among Spanish university students that study English. The students had to analyze some political memes about Trump and the different aspects of them, such as visuality, background knowledge, social context, and possible biases and motivations behind them. The students had some difficulties analyzing the memes. The visual aspects and literal meanings were recognized quite well, but difficulties arose when trying to examine the cultural context, the possible target audiences intended and the deeper meanings behind the memes (Dominguez Romero & Bobkina, 2021). The results are similar to those of Salo (2017), who researched the critical reading skills of Finnish high school students in regard to memes used in advertisements. They found that many students failed to recognize that the memes shown were commercial and made by companies - therefore, it would be important to teach more critical reading skills to today's youth that spend a lot of time consuming media (Salo, 2017).

Harvey & Palese (2018) step further in their research by using 'critical memetic literacy', a more specific approach to the topic, as their theoretical framework - according to them, it is a framework that combines critical media literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, critical literacy and memetics. Critical memetic literacy, therefore, considers the field of memetics and the fact that memes are not only on the internet, but exist in the 'real world' as well - it acknowledges that most students probably understand the basics of meme literacy already, but this theory allows to go even deeper into analyzing memes and their essence and spreading in society (Harvey & Palese, 2018). Their students had to create memes related to many societal issues such as politics, climate change, and feminism and analyze them, in which they succeeded (Harvey & Palese, 2018).

These examples of previous research demonstrate that memes can be used in the classroom a) for different purposes, b) for students of different levels of schools including middle school,

high school and university and c) using different types of literacies as the theoretical background. Therefore, it is by no means a simple or a straight-forward subject, and more research about it needs to be conducted. Based on the number of studies found on the subject it is evident that in recent years memes have become a topic of interest for teachers, but the studies done are quite small-scale. Further research is needed, as well as a more holistic approach of integrating memes to the classroom.

The researchers who conducted the studies about using memes in teaching also argued why studying memes in the classroom would be so important, and what possible issues could arise in doing so. According to Elmore and Coleman (2019), social media is inundated with political memes, and students will inevitably encounter them, and furthermore, they are a valuable text type that is appropriate for classroom investigation, as well as a good starting point for learning critical media literacy. Likewise, Knobel & Lankshear (as cited in Elmore & Coleman, 2019) state that material shared in social media can possibly affect public opinions and policies, and that therefore memes are influential tools of argument that need to be studied in classrooms. Elmore and Coleman (2019) add that according to Mirra, Morrel & Filipiak (cited in Elmore & Coleman, 2019) critical reading extends to not only analyzing the text itself, but also analyzing who wrote the text, and the target audience. Harvey and Palese (2018) state that when students understand the elements that make memes so powerful at transmitting cultural information, they can critically encounter, acknowledge, and create these devices themselves for humorous purposes as well as social and political commentary.

However, even though memes are important and relevant teaching material, using them can also cause some challenges. Harvey and Palese (2018) point out that in the classroom use, it is necessary to consider students' backgrounds and that not everybody is familiar with memes of the intertextual references in them, for cultural reasons for example. Furthermore, El Refaie and Horschelmann (as cited in Yus, 2019) remind that when interpreting memes, knowledge about current issues, news and political matters is crucial for full understanding; If a meme is analyzed in a completely different time, out of context, it will likely make little sense. For these reasons, it is important to ensure that the memes used in teaching are new enough, and suitable

for the students in regards of the amount of intertextuality and their level of knowledge in current issues.

4 ABOUT THE MATERIAL PACKAGE

This material package aims to teach Finnish upper secondary school students about the critical consumption of memes, drawing on the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The material consists of five lessons that were planned to suit 75-minutes time slots, since they are a quite common length for lessons in Finnish upper secondary schools – however, as the length of lessons can differ between schools, it is possible to modify the material for a larger number of shorter lessons or a smaller number of longer lessons. During the five lessons, students will learn what memes are, their characteristics, and about their development throughout the history of internet. Furthermore, students will learn how memes can impact society in both positive and negative ways, how misinformation and disinformation can be spread via memes, and how they can analyze memes and be critical consumers of them. Finally, towards the end of the material package, students will create their own memes of different topics and share the memes with other students.

This material package works best as supplementary material for the upper secondary English as a foreign language course ENA4 - *English as a tool of influencing* (NCCGUSE, 2019). Since the course consists of themes surrounding critical reading, thinking and information seeking, creating content, and agency in today's world, memes are excellent type of material for this course. In this section, I will explain in more detail the aims of the material and the framework in which the material is based, define the target group and course, and explain what types of tasks are included in the package and why.

4.1 Aim and theoretical framework of the material package

Memes are a common text type that students likely encounter in their everyday life and particularly in social media, and therefore, they should be able to read, analyze and create them critically. This material package aims to provide students with skills to do that, by implementing multiliteracy pedagogy. A further aim of the material package is for the students to improve many areas of their English skills: The material is designed so that the students practice vocabulary, writing, listening comprehension and reading comprehension skills in English. Furthermore, after the lessons students have practiced communicating in English by expressing opinions both in spoken and written form. Additionally, they learn about new technology and learning platforms.

The main theoretical framework for planning the teaching material was the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Cope and Kalantzis (2015) introduced four “pedagogical moves” or Knowledge Processes, which are: 1) Experiencing the known and experiencing the new, 2) Conceptualising by naming and conceptualizing by theory, 3) Analysing functionally and analysing critically, and 4) Applying appropriately and applying creatively. These Knowledge Processes were used as a basis for planning how the material package advances from introducing memes and their history to the students, to conceptualizing them, to analyzing them, and finally applying their knowledge by creating their own memes. The scaffolding nature of the Knowledge Processes is well illustrated by Cope and Kalantzis (2015) by some concrete examples of them implemented into teaching:

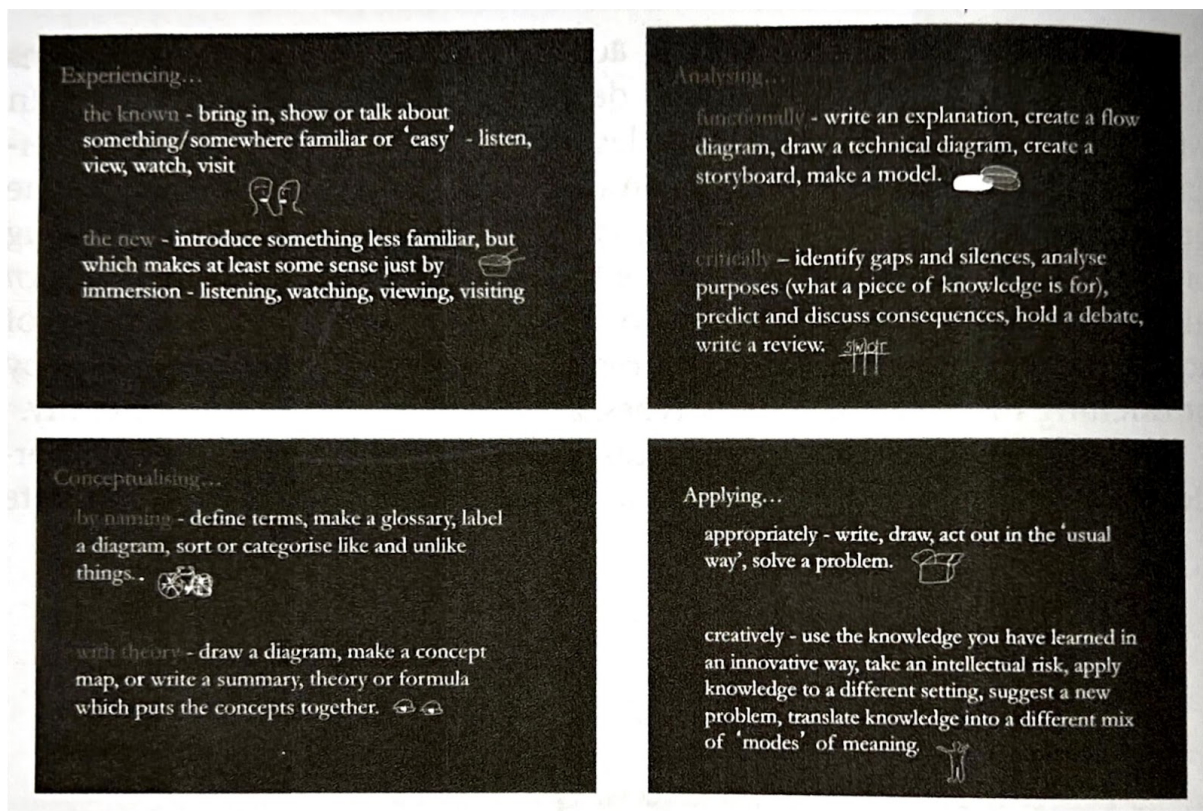


Figure 2. Some examples of the Knowledge Processes (Cope & Kalantzis 2015, p. 18)

According to Cope and Kalantzis (2015), experiencing in life outside educational context tends to be random, arbitrary, and not planned, whereas in educational context experiencing is usually carefully designed and constructed. Experiencing the Known as a Knowledge Process builds upon the real things one encounters in their everyday life: One's own experiences, the things they have gathered knowledge from, communities they have been a part of, subjective interests, and personal motivation (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Cope and Kalantzis (2015) note that the learners bring to the learning context these subjective experiences and personal knowledge, which then can be used as a basis for learning more. Experiencing the Known is implemented in the material package in the following way: The material starts with Lesson 1 introducing memes in a simple way, and showing the students memes, some of which are assumably familiar to the students if they have spent time on social media platforms. Showing and introducing them familiar and popular memes is the "Known". Furthermore, there is

pedagogical weaving, which is an important move between different knowledge processes (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015) happening between the educational and real-life context, when after Lesson 1 the students must bring a meme that they have encountered online to the next class as a homework: they are bringing a real-life experience, and a piece of their own perspective with them to the educational context.

Experiencing the New, on the other hand, means that learners are placed in a situation where they experience something unfamiliar, for example new situations, social groups and places, or new virtual domains such as new kinds of texts, images, data or other meanings (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015). In the material package this means that the material advances to introducing the timeline and history of some popular memes and exploring and discussing the most common characteristics of popular memes, which is the “New”. The “new” naturally depends on each learner’s point of view and previous experiences. Productive learning requires that the “new” must have some elements of familiarity to make at least some sense to the learner (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). This is based on the idea of scaffolding and Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development”, which mean that some of the information must be familiar and some of it must be new: this means that they are in a comfortable situation because of the familiar knowledge, but there is still enough new information for learning to occur (Vygotsky 1962, as cited in Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). In the material, there is a suitable amount of familiar and new information about memes for the learning to be scaffolded and effective.

Conceptualizing by Naming is a Knowledge Process where learners learn to categorize things, develop concepts, acquire the use of abstract terms, and create theoretical synthesis of them (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Cope and Kalantzis (2015) note that it is important for the students to become active conceptualizers and understand the concepts well, instead of merely superficially naming terms without acquiring knowledge of the deeper meanings. In the tasks of the material package, Conceptualizing by Naming is greatly present: The students must learn the concept of a meme, and how it differs from merely viral content. Furthermore, they learn about many terms and concepts in English about regarding the form or characteristics of memes, such as a caption, a template, an image macro, copyright, and so on. For practicing

Conceptualizing by Naming, a word explanation task works well. Therefore, in Lesson 2, there is a task where students must explain a word to their partner and the partner must guess which word it is. This tests well whether student has understood the concepts, since they need to verbalize how they understand the terms.

Conceptualizing with Theory, on the other hand, is a Knowledge Process where terms and concepts are linked to general language, and furthermore, the learners can create models, diagrams, or schemas of the semantic relations between concepts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). This type of theorizing develops more thorough, analytic understanding of concepts for the learners (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). In the teaching material, students practice Conceptualizing with Theory for example in Lesson 2 by theorizing needed prior knowledge in order to understand a specific meme, using the concepts they have recently learned.

According to Cope and Kalantzis (2015), Analyzing as a Knowledge Process requires learners to find explanations: they must investigate structures and purposes, cause and effect, and components and their relationships. Analyzing Functionally is a Knowledge Process including reasoning and revealing patterns: Learners investigate purposes of a text or other piece of information, by questioning what it does and how, how it is structured, and what kind of contexts are involved. In the material package this means that in Lesson 3, learners must analyze the form and the content of memes of a certain topic and how they attempt to be persuasive or relatable to the reader. In other words, students analyze the functions of a meme, therefore the technical aspects of it, but not any further human agency or ideologies behind the creation of the meme just yet. Cope and Kalantzis (2015) therefore state that Analyzing Functionally is objective examination.

Analyzing Critically, on the other hand, is a Knowledge Process where human agency and intentions are under scrutiny: When analyzing any piece of information, operation or object, learner must question whose perspective is represented, who it affects, whether it has some hidden motives or objectives behind it, and whether there could be some consequences for

anyone or anything from it. Cope and Kalantzis (2015) emphasize that opposed to objective functional analysis, Analyzing Critically is necessarily subjective, since it involves deeply subjective and human interests and intentions that depend on personal perspectives. Additionally, Analyzing Critically is argumentative instead of informational (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Analyzing Critically in the material package takes place particularly in lesson number 4, when learners must analyze deeper meanings, messages, and possible misinformation in memes.

The Knowledge Process of Applying, according to Cope and Kalantzis (2015, p. 21), “is about as real as education gets”: It is a Knowledge Process based on action. Learners are applying experiential, theoretical or critical knowledge into acting in the real world, and in the process learn something new. Applying Appropriately means that knowledge is applied in a predictable way, context-specifically: For example, items are used conventionally, or meanings are performed according to general customs (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). In the tasks of the material package, Applying Appropriately is implemented when students play a game online where they create their own memes in lesson 5: In the game, they are offered a popular meme template for which they must invent a suitable caption, and therefore create their own meme. As Cope and Kalantzis (2015) stated, learners bring knowledge from the previous knowledge processes into this: They apply the knowledge they have gathered of memes from previous lessons, and some of the meme templates used in the game might be familiar at this point. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2015), Applying Appropriately must not be exact replication of something done before, instead it must involve transformation or reinventing of some kind: This is realized in the meme creation game, when students must implement the very nature of memes by making their own remixes from their own perspective. Additionally, since the meme game has a time limit for creating the memes, at this point the topics of the memes should not be anything serious or difficult, but rather lighthearted and easy, in order to practice meme creation.

Finally, according to Cope and Kalantzis (2015), Applying Creatively is a Knowledge Process where learners must take a piece of information or meaning out of its usual context, and implement it somewhere else differently, often an unfamiliar context for the learner. Applying

Creatively can enhance the originality and creative skills of the students: According to Cope and Kalantzis (2015), Applying Creatively draws effectively from learners' personal interests, motives and goals, bringing new meanings and perceptions into the world. In the material package, Applying Creatively is realized in the following manner: Whereas the meme game explained in the previous paragraph is meant for initial practicing how to create memes appropriately, in the next task they must create more deep, meaningful and opinionated memes, and therefore enter a possibly unfamiliar situation. The material package suggests an extensive list of possible topics to create opinionated memes about, which ensures that each student can choose topics suitable to their own personal interests.

4.2 Target group and module

The material package was created for the 4th A-level English module in Finnish general upper secondary school, ENA4, *Englanti vaikuttamisen välineenä* or *English as a tool of exerting influence* (NCCGUSE 2019). The description of the module from the NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019, p. 182, author's own translation) is the following:

Table 1: The course description of ENA4 module (LOPS 2019)

<p>ENA4 (2 credits)</p> <p>The aim of the module is to develop thinking and studying skills by practicing critical reading and information seeking skills, as well as application and production based on them. The module examines inclusion, active agency, and the construction of democracy in English, in a linguistically, culturally, and ideologically diverse world.</p> <p>Goals of the course are for the students to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -familiarize oneself with current topics and their backgrounds on media -develop their skills to express their opinions and argumentations based on information -use different databases, learning environments and ways of creating text <p>Central contents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -making an impact and influencing the society -human rights, equality -individuals' responsibilities and obligations, freedom of speech -negotiating (everyday life and institutional) -media's role in influencing attitudes

As can be seen, the topics of the course are heavily focused on social issues, media and influencing, and memes related to all these very strongly, and therefore are well suitable material for the course. This course is usually taken on the second year of upper secondary school, which means the students are generally 17 or 18 years of age. According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (POPS 2014), students in Finland start learning their first foreign language, often English, at latest in third grade, at the age of nine. Therefore, by the time they are on the second year of upper secondary school and take this English module, they have studied English for at least approximately eight years, more likely nine. According to the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019, s. 177), the target level of English skills after upper secondary school is B2.1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019) also states that the level of English skills after basic education, when going into general upper secondary school, is B1.1, which therefore means that during this module their language level should be somewhere between B1 and B2 on the CEFR.

4.3 Examples of task types

The basis for the tasks regarding critical reading of memes were explained in earlier in the chapter, when introducing the theoretical framework. However, there are several types of additional tasks supporting these tasks and the language learning aspect of the material package. Some task types recur in the material package several times. I will introduce some of the task types in more detail and justify why they are included in the material.

4.3.1 Vocabulary tasks

Learning new vocabulary is one of the most essential aspects of language learning. Since this material package is meant to be implemented to a specific English module in upper secondary school, ENA4, it is important that the vocabulary used and learned during the lessons of the material package is as accurate for the target course as possible. I believe that the vocabulary used when teaching and discussing memes is already quite accurate for this course. However,

to make sure that the vocabulary used is as diverse and accurate as possible, I examined some course books meant for this module and selected some suitable vocabulary to be practiced in class during the lessons. The course books used for finding suitable vocabulary were *Elements: 4, Influence* (Browne et al., 2022) and *On Track: 4* (Daffue-Karsten et al., 2016). During lesson 2, there is a task where this collected vocabulary, and some words added by me, are practiced. I have already tested this activity in my teaching practice: It was with different vocabulary, but the task design was the same, and the activity was very successful. The students were excited to work in groups, and to be able to move physically in class and compete against other groups in who completes their vocabulary table first. During lesson 3, there is another vocabulary task played on Kahoot with words needed in the upcoming reading comprehension task. These vocabulary practices are attempting to teach and give repetition of new vocabulary to the students before they need to understand and use them again later during the lessons. This can possibly avoid frustration of students when they face new texts and discussions and have already learned some central vocabulary from them.

4.3.2 Group tasks/discussions

The material includes several group discussions and group research tasks. Such tasks are important in order to practice speaking English, and to practice group work skills in English. Additionally, on a course that includes a lot of expressing one's opinions and influencing, it is important to share one's perspective and different opinions in a group. Furthermore, one of the aims of the ENA4 module is expressing and evaluating opinions, as well as argumentation (LOPS 2019). In the material package, there are group discussions for example about students' perceptions of memes, and opinions regarding specific memes. Group research tasks include a task where students must research how memes have been used in different areas of society, and a task where they must critically analyze memes.

4.3.3 Online games

The NCCGUSE (LOPS 2019) states that upper secondary school must use diverse learning platforms, including digital platforms, since they enhance learning multiliteracies. Furthermore, there are several online learning platforms that can be used to activate the students and enhance their agency in the classroom. Furthermore, online games such as Kahoot are effective ways of practicing new vocabulary. Online games are used in the material package when learning vocabulary, and when practicing meme creation.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This material package has several strengths. It is very topical since memes are so present and important in today's online world. Multiliteracies, and as a part of them, critical reading skills, are essential nowadays, and they are learned through using this material. The notion of multiliteracies emphasizes the variety of different and diverse texts, and the variety of different kinds of texts used in the tasks is indeed remarkable. The material includes a variety of memes, written texts such as news articles, audiovisual material such as YouTube videos, images, symbols, and a lot of different online platforms. Navigating and using all these during the lessons develops multiliteracies skills greatly.

Using the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies and the Knowledge Processes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015) as the theoretical framework for planning the package worked well: The material progresses suitably according to the Knowledge Processes, and there is pedagogical weaving happening both between the different Knowledge Processes, and between the educational context and the non-educational "real life" context. Even though Cope and Kalantzis' (2015) Pedagogy of Multiliteracies was a suitable framework for planning this material, in my opinion it is by no means perfect; I found it somewhat vague, which is probably purposeful, since it can be implemented in basically anything. However, this process and navigating the plethora of different, partly overlapping literacy theories left me wondering whether there will at some point be a specific theory of literacy just for reading and analyzing memes.

While researching, analyzing, and creating memes while using this material, the students learn not only essential critical reading skills, but also a lot of English language: vocabulary and idioms related to the online world and media, as well as different skills related to English such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and communication. Simultaneously, they

learn to use different online platforms with different devices. Therefore, the material is remarkably suitable to the target module that emphasizes media and influencing.

I believe that this material package manages to scaffold the learning about memes for both students and the teacher. Teachers, particularly the ones from older generations, can sometimes be somewhat unfamiliar with social media and the online phenomena such as memes, and furthermore, the students can also have very different starting points and experiences when it comes to social media and understanding memes. This material does not require the teacher to be an expert in memes beforehand. The material starts building from the basics, but is still not boring for those who are experienced with the topic. I believe that learning about memes is fruitful for the teacher if they are unfamiliar with the topic, since after that they can understand better the internet phenomena and culture that the youth, and therefore their students, consume. I believe it is interesting for the teacher to see during the course which type of memes the students choose in different tasks, and they get to see whether there are some generational gaps in what type of humor they consider funny or interesting.

Perhaps the most significant strength of the material package is that it is fun and creative both for the students and teacher. Memes are authentic material that students encounter in their free time as well, the kind of material that should be used in language classes as much as possible, to bring together the educational context and life outside school. My own limited experiences of using memes in teaching during my teaching practice have been successful, and I believe this material would also gain popularity among students.

The process of writing this thesis was indeed not without complications. Fast-changing nature of the internet and meme culture causes its challenges for teaching materials design. Designing teaching materials is a time-consuming task, and during the design process the internet has likely already moved on to new trends, and when another teacher decides to use that material package perhaps even several years later, the meme culture has changed even further. That is why teachers who decide to use memes as teaching material should be prepared to modify their

learning materials according to newer trends and newer memes. It is much more meaningful and interesting for the students to critically analyze memes that are about a recent topic, rather than something that happened years ago and is perhaps no more relevant or appearing on the internet.

There are several potential pitfalls in using memes as teaching material, which are not impossible to overcome, but should be considered by teachers in order to avoid them. Regarding copyrights, memes are still a somewhat grey area, and the copyrights differ between different countries. However, if memes are not used in commercial purposes, it is generally speaking legally safe to use them. According to the European Commission (2023), “Uploading memes (online) and other content generated by users for purposes of quotation, criticism, review, caricature, parody and pastiche (like GIFs or similar) is specifically allowed”. In this teaching material, memes are used for reviewing, criticizing, and likely parody purposes when students create their own memes, so all this use is included in the regulations set by the European Commission. Furthermore, the material is designed so that the memes created during the lessons do not have to be posted online, but they can strictly maintain in the classroom.

Memes can sometimes contain curse words or other inappropriate content. Teachers should be aware this and consider if they still want to use them as teaching material, and how to possibly avoid any content that is too vulgar or harmful for students. However, as the students in the target module are most likely between 16 and 18 years of age, it is very likely that they use social media on their free time and encounter some problematic content and vulgarities, which are quite common on TikTok and X for instance. I argue that because of the students most likely encounter problematic content anyway in some context, it would be important to cover these issues at school and give the students tools to recognize and handle the “dark side of the internet” in a safe environment at school, under the teacher’s guidance. Furthermore, if the teacher wishes to control the content that the students see during the lessons, the material package can be modified so that only memes chosen by the teacher in advance will be used during the lessons.

Another constantly changing element regarding this material package that needs to be considered is the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (LOPS 2019). The new National Core Curriculums are published every few years. This means that the objectives and regulations are subject for change in the future core curriculums, and therefore the teaching material package might not be accurate for teaching anymore. However, considering how important multiliteracies skills in today's world full of technology, and how memes are not likely to cease from existing anytime soon, I believe with perhaps slight modifications this material will still be relevant in the years to come.

Because using internet memes in teaching is a relatively new practice, there is not much extensive research of it yet. There have been some small-scale studies conducted, but I could not find many that would have been about teaching English as a foreign language. This material package, as far as I know, seems to be the first one of its kind, at least in the Finnish context. The only project I came across even close to what I am doing in Finland is *Meemikoulu* (Meemikoulu, 2023), which is a blog project introducing research and some online learning materials about memes. However, the materials linked by Meemikoulu (Meemikoulu, 2023) are almost all in Finnish, and therefore are not suitable for EFL teaching. Not having extensive previous examples of meme material packages could be seen as a challenge, but I see it as more of an asset: Being assumably the first one in the Finnish context writing their thesis of this topic, I was assured that there indeed is a gap in research, and I felt creative freedom and excitement of doing something innovative and new.

There are many future considerations for this type of material being used in the Finnish high schools. In addition to memes being used in the English class, they could also be connected to many other subjects as well. There could be interdisciplinary learning modules planned with the social studies subject for example, because of the influential nature of memes. Furthermore, this material package could be modified for more advanced groups and education levels. Due to the target group of this material package likely having intermediate English skills, the activities are purposefully only moderately difficult, and include only basic level critical

analysis of memes. For students with more advanced language skills and critical reading skills, for example in the university, this could be modified into a more difficult and profound material of studying and analyzing memes.

REFERENCES

- Akram, U., Irvine, K., Allen, S. F., Stevenson, J. C., Ellis, J. G., & Drabble, J. (2021). Internet memes related to the COVID-19 pandemic as a potential coping mechanism for anxiety. *Scientific reports*, 11(1), 22305. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-00857-8>
- Boyle, C. (2022). How do you meme?: Using memes for information literacy instruction. *The Reference librarian*, 63(3), 82-101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2022.2084210>
- Browne, R., Davies, M., Hakkarainen, S., Hietanen, H., Kae, T., Luhtala, M., . . . Teiri, L. (2022). *Elements: 4, Influence* (1. painos.). Sanoma Pro Oy.
- Cauberghe, V., Van Wesenbeeck, I., De Jans, S., Hudders, L., & Ponnet, K. (2021). How Adolescents Use Social Media to Cope with Feelings of Loneliness and Anxiety During COVID-19 Lockdown. *Cyberpsychology, behavior and social networking*, 24(4), 250-257. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0478>
- Cazden, C., Cope, B., Fairclough, N., Gee, J., Kalantzis, M., Kress, G., . . . Nakata, M. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard educational review*, 66(1), 60-92. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.66.1.17370n67v22j160u>
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2015). *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Learning by design*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Daffue-Karsten, L., Davies, M., Kae, T., Myller, R., Rantanen, P., & Vuorinen, P. (2016). *On Track: 4* (1. painos.). Sanoma Pro Oy.
- Dawkins, R. (2016). *The selfish gene: Oxford Landmark Science*. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
- Domínguez Romero, E., & Bobkina, J. (2021). Exploring critical and visual literacy needs in digital learning environments: The use of memes in the EFL/ESL university classroom. *Thinking skills and creativity*, 40, 100783. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100783>
- Ebrand Suomi Oy. (2022). Suomessa asuvien 13-29 -vuotiaiden nuorten sosiaalisen median palveluiden käyttäminen ja läsnäolo (2022), jonka tekijä on Ebrand Group Oy & Oulun kaupungin sivistys- ja kulttuuripalvelut on lisensoitu Creative Commons Nimeä-Ei muutoksia-Epäkaupallinen 3.0 Muokkaamaton -lisenssillä. <https://wordpress.ebrand.fi/somejanuoret2022/>
- Elmore, P. G., & Coleman, J. M. (2019). Middle School Students' Analysis of Political Memes to Support Critical Media Literacy. *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy*, 63(1), 29-40. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.948>

- Gardner, K. J., Jabs, N., Drabble, J., & Akram, U. (2021). Humor styles influence the perception of depression-related internet memes in depression. *Humor (Berlin, Germany)*, 34(4), 497-517. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2021-0045>
- Glitsos, L., & Hall, J. (2019). The Pepe the Frog meme: An examination of social, political, and cultural implications through the tradition of the Darwinian Absurd. *Journal for cultural research*, 23(4), 381-395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2019.1713443>
- Harvey, L. & Palese, E. (2018). #NeverthelessMemesPersisted: Building Critical Memetic Literacy in the Classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(3), 259– 270. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.898>
- Heiskanen, B. (2017). Meme-ing electoral participation. *European Journal of American Studies*, 12(2), 52. doi:10.4000/ejas.12158
- Ireland, S. (2018). Fake news alerts: Teaching news literacy skills in a meme world. *The Reference librarian*, 59(3), 122-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2018.1463890>
- Kariko, A. A. T., & Anasih, N. (2019). Laughing at one's self: A study of self-reflective internet memes. *Journal of physics. Conference series*, 1175(1), 12250. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1175/1/012250>
- Kayali, N. K., & Altuntas, A. (2021). Using Memes in the Language Classroom. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 9(3), 155-160.
- Know Your Meme. <https://knowyourmeme.com/> (24 November 2023)
- Kupiainen, R. (2019). Monilukutaidon pedagogiikan lähtökohtia. In: M. Harmanen & M. Hartikainen (eds.), *Monilukutaitoa oppimassa*. Helsinki: PunaMusta Oy. 23–31.
- Laineste, L., & Voolaid, P. (2017). Laughing across borders: Intertextuality of internet memes. *European journal of humour research*, 4(4), 26-49. <https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR2016.4.4.laineste>
- LOPS 2015: Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet: Nuorille tarkoitetun lukiokoulutuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015 (2016). Opetushallitus. https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/172124_lukion_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2015.pdf
- LOPS 2019: Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet: Nuorille tarkoitetun lukiokoulutuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019 (2019). Opetushallitus. https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/lukion_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2019.pdf
- Meemikoulu. <https://meemikoulu.wordpress.com/> (15 November, 2023)
- Palsa, L, Pekkala, L. & Salomaa, S. (2019). Monilukutaito ja media – kasvatuksen pedagogiikka. In: M. Harmanen & M. Hartikainen (eds.), *Monilukutaitoa oppimassa*. Helsinki: PunaMusta Oy. 41–49.

POPS 2014: Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014 (2015). Opetushallitus. https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/perusopetuksen_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2014.pdf

Purnama, A. D. (2017). Incorporating Memes and Instagram to Enhance Student's Participation. *LLT journal (Online)*, 20(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v20i1.404>

Salo, K. (2017). Lukiolaisten medialukutaidot internetin ja mainonnan kuvien tulkinnassa [pro gradu -tutkielma, Lapin yliopisto]. Lauda-julkaisuarkisto. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:ula-201705221181>

Salomaa, S., & Palsa, L. (2019). Media literacy in Finland: National media education policy. Ministry of Education and Culture. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162065/OKM_2019_39.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in digital culture*. The MIT Press.

Sorte, P. B., & Santos, J. D. C. A. (2020). Memes in English classes: exploring multiliteracy practices. *Revista Educação em Questão*, 58(55).

Tuters, M., & Hagen, S. (2020). (((They))) rule: Memetic antagonism and nebulous othering on 4chan. *New media & society*, 22(12), 2218-2237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819888746>

Wiggibs, B. E. (2019). *The discursive power of memes in digital culture: Ideology, semiotics, and intertextuality*. Routledge.

Williams, A. (2020). Black Memes Matter: #LivingWhileBlack With Becky and Karen. *Social media + society*, 6(4), 205630512098104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120981047>

Yus, F. (2019). Multimodality in memes: A cyberpragmatic approach. *Analyzing Digital Discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Zulli, D., & Zulli, D. J. (2022). Extending the Internet meme: Conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok platform. *New media & society*, 24(8), 1872-1890. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 MATERIAL PACKAGE

Using memes in Finnish upper secondary school English classes: A material package for multiliteracy pedagogy

Hello there, fellow teacher.

Have you ever paid attention to internet memes, those (mostly) funny pictures and videos that pop up on our social media feeds and group chats? Memes can create a sense of community and possibly lighten up the mood in hard times, but they can also alter people's opinions, and spread misinformation. As teenagers today are more likely to encounter memes on social media than not, it is important for them to understand their characteristics, whether they should be shared or not, how we can recognize the possible dangers in them and analyse the motives behind them. Or in other words, how to become critical and ethical meme consumers and creators. Memes are great, topical, and authentic materials to use in teaching, and relevant for multiliteracies skills. Finnish youth use social media quite a lot, and much of it is in English, so it is not enough for them to be critical readers and media consumers in Finnish, they also need to possess those skills in English.

This material package was designed for Finnish upper secondary schools, for the fourth

English module, *ENA4: English as a tool of exerting influence*. As the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education states, multiliteracies are an important part of the transversal competence areas, and this material draws on the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The material package consists of 5 lessons and was created with 75-minute lessons in mind. The package moves from the basic characteristics and history of memes to discussing their role in media more deeply, to critically analysing some memes, to finally letting the students create their own memes and share them with the class. The whole package or only chosen parts can be implemented to the module, that is up to you and your students.

PS. A note about copyrights: Memes can be under copyright. Whatever memes you decide to use in teaching, you should always credit the original poster and add the source, if it is known. However, the use of memes in educational contexts is generally considered 'fair use'. Additionally, as the European Commission states, "Uploading memes (online) and other content generated by users for purposes of quotation, criticism, review, caricature, parody and pastiche (like GIFs or similar) is specifically allowed."

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_2821

The meanings of different colors in the package:

Blue background: Instructions for the teacher

Green text: Correct answers

Happy teaching and learning!

Lesson 1. Introduction to memes

Goals of the lesson:

- To be a fun, interesting introduction to the topic
- To awaken the foreknowledge and experience the students have about memes, if any
- To demonstrate how memes have developed throughout the history and that they can come in many types and forms
- To create discussion about what type of content goes viral and becomes a meme, what characteristics they usually have in common

1. Warm-up task: which meme are you today (5 min)

Show this meme collage of 9 images expressing different moods on the classroom screen, and students must move in class to one of the spots between 1-9 to show their current mood. Tag the spots from 1 to 9 in the classroom beforehand with signs, and tell the students to go to an accurate spot.

Which meme are you today?



Which meme are you today? (2017). Retrieved from <https://9gag.com/gag/apQZp2p?ref=pn>

2. Warm-up discussion about memes in groups (15 min)

Create groups of 3 to 4 students. Give them the list of the following questions to discuss. Be prepared to go around in class and help create conversation if a group is having difficulties with the questions. Afterwards, you can have a short summary discussion together with the class about their answers.

Questions:

- What do you think is a meme?
- Do you encounter memes in your everyday life? Where?
- Who makes memes?
- Are they always images, or can they be in other forms too?
- Have you shared memes with your friends?
- Have you ever made a meme yourself? If yes, why? What was it about?
- What do you think is the purpose of memes?
- What is your general opinion about memes?

3. The evolution of memes (15 min)

Give a presentation with the following slides about some popular memes. Tell the students to pay attention to what types of characteristics there are in these popular memes: There will be follow-up discussion afterwards. The purpose of this presentation is to give a short overview of the “evolution of memes” within the last decades.

A MEME

- There have been memes already before the Internet
- A biologist Richard Dawkins, invented the term "meme" in 1976
- A meme originally meant any cultural item, such as songs, stories and fashion, spreading from person to person
- An example of a meme before the Internet: Kilroy Was Here
- American soldiers, during World War 2, drew this character on walls and equipment in different places -> became a known meme

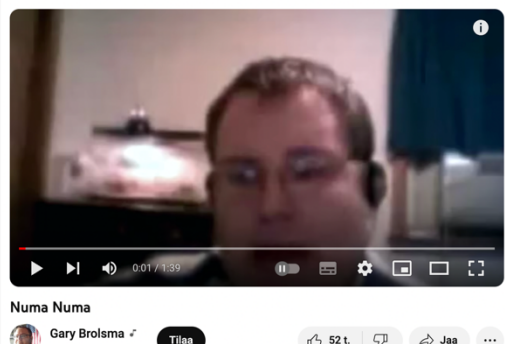


Source: KnowYourMeme, Kilroy Was Here
<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/kilroy-was-here>

Source: KnowYourMeme, Kilroy Was Here. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/kilroy-was-here>

THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNET MEMES

- Internet memes in the beginning of the 00's were often videos
- An example of a memetic video from 2004: "Numa Numa guy" lipsyncing and dancing to the song "Dragostea din Tei" by O-Zone
- Originally downloaded on Newgrounds, later on Youtube, gaining hundreds of millions of views until now
- Watch the video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cqd1Gvq-RBY>



Sources: Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press.
KnowYourMeme, Numa Numa: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/numa-numa>

YouTube, Numa Numa (if you wish to show the video to the students):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cqd1Gvq-RBY&t=1s>

EVOLUTION OF INTERNET MEMES

- LOLcats (from 2006): a genre of cat pictures accompanied by misspelled words



Source: KnowYourMeme, LOLcats: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/lolcats>

- Grumpy Cat memes, from an image of perhaps the most famous individual cat, Tardar Sauce (2012)



Source: KnowYourMeme, Grumpy Cat:
<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/grumpy-cat>

THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNET MEMES

- RageComics (2008), a series of funny looking cartoon drawings that express different emotions



Source: KnowYourMeme, Rage Comics
<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/rage-comics>

- One particularly known RageComic, Trollface (2008), that internet trolls often used



Source: KnowYourMeme, Troll Face
<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/trollface>

THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNET MEMES

- Another example of a memetic video (series): Harlem Shake (2013)
- People dancing wildly to Baauer's song "Harlem Shake"
- Original video created by video blogger Filthy Frank
- Sparked thousands of versions created on YouTube by different people all over the world



Source: KnowYourMeme, Harlem Shake: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/harlem-shake>

YouTube, Best Harlem Shake Compilation (if you wish to show students):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tgZWzG4548>

THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNET MEMES

- The use of internet and social media has become more popular throughout the years -> More meme formats, and from more topics, and arguably more random ones



Source: KnowYourMeme, Distracted Boyfriend: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/distracted-boyfriend>



Source: KnowYourMeme, Galaxy Brain: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/galaxy-brain>



Source: KnowYourMeme, Bernie Sanders Wearing Mittens Sitting in a Chair: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/bernie-sanders-wearing-mittens-sitting-in-a-chair>

4. Discussion of common characteristics of memes (15 min)

Set up a Padlet wall at <https://fi.padlet.com/> . Note that on Padlet, you can create 3 padlets for free. Divide the students into groups of 3 or 4, and give them the following question:

Based on these examples of popular memes, what do you think are important characteristics for a meme to become popular? Discuss in groups, and write down some ideas on Padlet.

Go through the answers on Padlet with the class:

If the answers of the students are something completely different, you can tell them some of these points:

Memes often

- contain (a catchy) song/melody, if it is a video
- a “challenge” that people can do themselves and post about it
- contains funny expressions/faces
- A combination of a picture and (little) text
- Animals

5. A viral, a meme, remixing...? A presentation about meme terms (10 min)

A viral video/image is essentially a popular video/image, that spreads to wide audiences online without any changes. However, for a video or image to become a meme, it needs to be mimicked or remixed – so it needs to be altered in some way when it spreads. Demonstrate this to the students with these slides:

A "VIRAL"

= An image/video gains a lot of popularity online, possibly worldwide, but does not change (much) in the process of sharing

An example of a viral video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGOfzZOyl8>



394th District Court of Texas - Live Stream
394th Judicial District Court
Recording of this hearing or live stream is prohibited.
Violation may constitute contempt of court and result in a fine of up to \$500 and a jail term of up to 180 days.

Jerry L. Phillips

The Guardian

ZO 0.49

'I'm not a cat': lawyer gets stuck on Zoom kitten filter during court case
18 milj. katselukertaa • 2 vuotta sitten

Guardian News ✓

A lawyer showed up to virtual court in the 394th district of Texas with a kitten filter turned on, the cat moving its lips and eyes, as ...

YouTube, 'I'm not a cat': lawyer gets stuck on Zoom kitten filter during court case:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGOfzZOyl8>

HOW IS A MEME DIFFERENT FROM A VIRAL VIDEO/IMAGE?

- A meme is a cultural item that spreads from person to person, often changing in the process
- An important aspect of the creation of internet memes: either **mimicking** (matkiminen) or **remixing** (miksaaminen)
- Remixing = editing the image or the caption of the meme, and therefore creating new meanings and purposes for it

Source: Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press.

AN EXAMPLE OF A MEME AND HOW IT HAS BEEN REMIXED



- The original image: A man standing in front of stock market figures, and an intentionally misspelled word "stonks"
- Used online, often as a reaction image to bad financial decisions

Source: KnowYourMeme, Stonks: <https://amp.knowyourmeme.com/memes/stonks>

DIFFERENT REMIXES OF "STONKS" MEME

When you eat a fruit and feel healthy AF



When your car is making a weird noise so you just turn your music up



When you pause the music but you keep your headphones on so you can eavesdrop on the conversation



Similar characteristics in each meme:

1. The same character doing a different job
2. A misspelled word (health, mechanic, spy)
3. A sarcastic caption that suggests that an (often comical) action makes you a professional in that field

Source of the memes: "Stonk Exchange" Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/stonkexchange>

6. Homework to students explained (5-10 min)

Screenshot a meme (must be in English) that you come across before the next class, on any social media platform. If you do not come across any memes, you can try to find one you like

on Google or Instagram. Bring it to the next class. Keep in mind it needs to be suitable for school, nothing inappropriate. Additionally, write down which platform and/or account the meme is from. Think about the following questions:

- Why do you think the meme of your choice was created? Is there a purpose?
- Have you seen any similar memes before, with the same picture or with the same topic?

Lesson 2. Vocabulary and concepts regarding memes

Goals of the lesson:

- To learn new vocabulary and concepts related to the internet, society and influencing
- To practice using and explaining the concepts
- To learn to analyze the form of memes - and understand that texts can be more than just traditional written texts

1. Checking the homework (15 min)

In groups of 3 or 4, look at the memes you found as homework and compare them. Discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think the meme of your choice was created? Have you seen any similar memes before, with the same picture or with the same topic?
- Which platforms did each of you find the memes from?
- How are the memes different/similar?

- What elements can you identify on the memes? (For example traditional text, images, videos, sound? Anything else?)
- Are they serious or lighthearted?
- What topics are they handling? List all the topics in your group


2. Teacher-led discussion on different aspects of an image macro (10 min)

Use this slide to teach the students about the different aspects of an image macro (a caption, a photo), and with the help questions, demonstrate what kind of background knowledge is needed to understand the meme (answers below).

ASPECTS AND ANALYSIS OF A MEME

a caption

POV: My Dad after the bartender asks if I want 'the regular', even though I just turned 21



- Who is this?
- Why do you think the picture has become a meme? Do you know the context where the picture is taken?
- What does POV mean? You can google if needed.
- What kind of cultural/background knowledge would you need to understand this meme? Which country is the context?

Source: Just mistaken identity... (2023). Retrieved from https://www.reddit.com/r/memes/comments/177nfv/just_mistaken_identity/

- Who is this?
Donald Trump, a former president of the United States
- Why has the picture become a meme?
For example: funny expression, pictures of famous people often become memes, the fact that it is a mugshot

- What does “POV” mean? You can use Google if needed.
POV=point of view, often used in memes similarly to “that feeling when”
- What kind of cultural/background knowledge would you need in order to understand this meme?
 - what does it mean to say “the regular” to a bartender
 - that the context of the meme is probably the USA and the age limit of legal drinking there is 21
 - perhaps even the context of the picture: Donald Trump, the former US president, and it is his mugshot that became a meme

3. Students own analysis of the form and content of a meme (10 min)

Divide students into pairs. Now students must analyze another meme in a similar way themselves, with a pair. Be prepared to walk around in class and help.

YOUR TURN TO ANALYSE (WITH A PAIR)!



- Identify the caption(s) and the images to your pair
- What are these characters?
- What kind of background knowledge do you need for understanding this meme?
- Which country do you think is the context and why?

Source of the meme: "Crippling things" Facebook group:
<https://www.facebook.com/criplingthings>

Background knowledge needed: What German “das” means, or it can also be interpreted to be a different way of writing “that’s”


Which context: Perhaps the USA, due to the expensive doctor’s bill

4. The concept of intertextuality explained with the following slide (5 min)

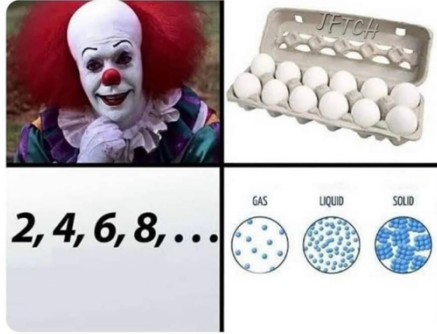
INTERTEXTUALITY

- Referring to already existing texts (books, songs, movies, other memes)
- Can be difficult or impossible to understand a meme if you do not know what it refers to
- Do you understand these memes? Which texts do they refer to?

Me: I'm afraid of the Backstreet Boys
Therapist: Tell me why
Me:



I tried so hard and got so far but in the end...



Source of the memes: "OH NAW Memes" Facebook group:
<https://www.facebook.com/OHNAW>

1. The hamster meme: Refers to Backstreet Boys’ song “I want it that way”. The therapist says “tell me why (you are afraid of that song)” but “tell me why” are also lyrics of the song, hence the hamster getting scared.
2. The collage meme: In order to understand the meme, the reader must know the song “In the End” by Linkin Park. After the quote in the caption the song continues “It doesn’t even matter”, hence the pictures: 1. It (intertextuality is needed for knowing this as well, since it refers to Stephen King’s famous clown IT) 2. Dozen 3. Even 4. Matter. Without knowing the song, it could be nearly impossible to understand the meme, because the reader could easily interpret the pictures as, for example, 1. Clown 2. Eggs 3. Numbers 4. States of matter

5. An “Alias” game of explaining concepts related to memes (10 min)

Preparation: Students must work in pairs. Print the table below so that each pair has one set of terms (cut into pieces). Don’t let them see the words beforehand. Students take turns picking up one concept from the pile and explaining it to their partner (without saying the word on paper or any part of it out loud). The partner must guess the concept they mean.

a meme	a caption	a template
a remix	copyright	viral
an image	intertextuality	prior knowledge
edit	fake news	a post

6. Vocabulary practice about for these upcoming lessons, related to social media, influencing, and social issues (15 min)

Divide students into groups of four. Each group must have the template of words in Finnish in one piece, and the English translations cut into pieces where each piece has one word (make sure to mix each pile of words so it’s not in order). Each team must be located on the opposite side of the class from where their words are on a table. When the time starts, each team sends two people (to ease the possible anxiety of having to do this alone) with two words at a time to put the English words on the right place in the Finnish template. The first team to have their template complete with the English translations wins. If there is time, feel free to play again, since it is better to get repetition with new vocabulary.

provosoida	vaikutus	piirre	seuraus
uskottava	oikeuttaa	edustaa	asia
liike	medianluku- taito	kohdeyleisö	mainos, ilmoitus
algoritmi	syöte, uutissyöte	intertekstu- aalisuus	trendaava, suosittu
viraali	ideologia	vastuu	kuluttaa, käyttää
kiistan- alainen	tarkistaa faktat	tietoisuus	vakuuttava
valtamedia	julkaista, julkaisu	kuvateksti	tekijän- oikeus

provoke	an impact	an aspect	a consequence
credible	justify	represent	an issue
a movement	media literacy	target audience	an adverti- sment
an algorithm	a feed	inter- textuality	trending
viral	an ideology	responsibi- lity	consume
contro- versial	fact-check	awareness	persuasive
mainstream media	post	a caption	copyright

Lesson 3. How memes can impact society

Goals of the lesson:

- To practice reading comprehension with a news article about the topic
- To practice listening comprehension with the homework video
- To do research in how memes can be used for different purposes of influencing

1. Vocabulary learning task: Kahoot (10 min)

Kahoot is an online platform where you can host quizzes. The vocabulary in this Kahoot quiz is from the upcoming reading comprehension (task 3 on this lesson).

The teacher follows this link to be able to host the Kahoot quiz:

<https://create.kahoot.it/details/1ec4bc57-1078-42e9-a8c6-38e098627606>

When the teacher opens the lobby, there is a code visible on the screen. The students go to **kahoot.it**, and enter the code on their own smart phones/laptops. When everybody is in, the game can start.

2. How memes have been used in different discourse: Group research (30 min)

Now it would be time for the students to practice some more independent research with more freedom. The purpose of this task is to chart how memes have been used in different aspects of society, such as advertisement, influencing (social justice and human rights), discussions of mental health, and sense of belonging/community in hard times such as the pandemic.

This is done in the form of group research work, in groups of 3 to 4 students. Every group must have at least one laptop. They should then choose one of the topics below and create a mind map about how memes have been used concerning their topic. Students should be

encouraged to find some specific cases and memes, and add some memes to the poster/mindmap. Additionally, students are to analyze their form and content, similarly to previous class. However, this time the analysis should be a bit deeper, following the questions of each topic.

1. Human rights/social justice

- What human rights issue are these memes addressing, and how?
- Is the tone humorous or serious, or both?

2. Advertising

- How do these memes persuade the consumer to buy their product?
- Can you find information about whether there was a permission to use the meme in the advertisements? If not, was there any consequences for the company?

3. Mental health awareness

- What is the message behind these mental health memes, and their purpose?
- Do they address a specific mental health issue, or just mental health issues in general?

4. Sense of community/relatable things in hard times such as during COVID

- How do these memes create a sense of community/relatability?

5. Climate change awareness

- How do these memes argue about climate change?
- Are there any specific scientific claims in the memes? Is it possible to fact check them, and how?

3. Reading comprehension with an online news article (20 min)

This is done independently in class. Provide the students with the link to the online article, and the reading comprehension questions below. Check the correct answers afterwards

together. Advise the students to write the answers in their own words, not directly copying from the text.

The Article: “In the age of memes, how are young people getting their news?”: PBS news hour, by Lizz Bolaji and Michael Boulter:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/in-the-age-of-memes-how-are-young-people-getting-their-news>

Reading comprehension questions about the article:

1. Why did 17-year-old Luc Charlebois Google “World War 3”?
2. What were people on the internet joking/making memes about, and why?
3. According to the article, what is the most common news source for teens?
4. What does the article say about influencers and celebrities as a news source?
5. What does Jamie Withorne think is as a possible reason why the youth consume memes?
6. What does Withourne claim is dangerous about memes?
7. How did Kaleb Velez find out about the drone strike on the Iranian general?
8. How do mentioned Facebook groups use memes?
9. How does Omar Elbaba criticize memes?
10. According to Velez and Withorne, what do memes motivate people to do?

Correct answers:

1. He saw World War 3 trending online and a lot of memes about the topic
2. That the USA might be soon in a war with USA, following a drone strike killing an Iranian general
3. Social media and YouTube, instead of traditional news outlets

4. Teens follow influencers and celebrities as much as news organizations, but they trust influencers and celebrities less
5. They bring comfort into difficult situations, and a way to deal with negative feelings
6. Memes show just a small glimpse of a big issue: A meme cannot tell enough about an world-wide crisis
7. He saw a meme on a Reddit meme page, and decided to look for more information
8. To get their followers to share their content
9. Memes can be insensitive, making fun of a serious situation
10. They can get people who don't follow the news to find out about recent events and motivate to look for more information

4. Homework explained (5 min)

Listening comprehension practice of **Insider Tech's YouTube video "How This Frog Became A Symbol of Hope and Hate"**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlmy7lidmpc&t=312s>

Try to understand without subtitles, but note that you can turn on the subtitles on the video, if it is otherwise difficult to understand.

Questions to answer during watching the video:

1. What happened to the meme Pepe the Frog?
2. Why was Pepe considered relatable by internet users?
3. What are "Rare Pepes"?
4. In 2015, how did some internet users prank journalists?
5. How is Donald Trump associated with Pepe the Frog? (2:47 ->)
6. What was #FrogTwitter ?
7. What happened in September 2016? (4.51 ->)
8. What does Matt Furie, the creator of Pepe the Frog, think about all this, and what did he tried to do about it?

9. In what context was Pepe the Frog used in Hong Kong?’
10. What does the video say about the history and meaning of swastika?

After the video (questions about your own opinions):

1. What do you think about Pepe the Frog?
2. How do you feel about the discussion of copyrights when it comes to memes?
Should memes be allowed to spread freely, or does everybody have exclusive rights to the memes they have created?
3. The discussion about Pepe the Frog as a hate symbol was taking place in the United States. Do you think it affected whether people used it or not in Finland? Would you still use it in Finland since the context is different, or is the meme “ruined” everywhere?
4. What can people in social media do to combat the spread of harmful or misleading memes, while still respecting freedom of expression?
5. What can individuals do to be critical consumers of memes and online content in general? How can you know the difference between humor and harmful intent?

Lesson 4. Let's get critical

Goals of the lesson:

- To learn the difference between misinformation and disinformation
- To understand that memes can be harmful and present false information -
- To analyze a meme critically: what message does the meme convey, who is behind the message, are there hidden motives, how to fact check memes?

1. Checking the homework (15 min)

The right answers to the questions:

1. What happened to the meme Pepe the Frog?
(It went from a harmless meme to be classified as a hate symbol)
2. Why was Pepe considered relatable by internet users?
(Its emotions were relatable)
3. What are "Rare Pepes"?
(New, unseen versions of Pepes that are "valuable")
4. How is Donald Trump associated with Pepe the Frog? (2:47 ->)
(Trump retweeted a video related to Pepe and that fueled the popularity of Pepe in white nationalist context)
5. What was #FrogTwitter ?
(Some twitter users started adding the frog emoji to their twitter handles in solidarity with white nationalism)
6. What happened in September 2016? (4.51 ->)
(The Anti-Defamation league added Pepe the Frog to their database of hate symbols)
7. What does Matt Furie, the creator of Pepe the Frog, think about all this, and what did he tried to do about it?
(He does not like the evolution of Pepe, and wrote a comic where Pepe dies, and has sued The Daily Stormer and InfoWars for using Pepe)
8. In what context was Pepe the Frog used in Hong Kong?
(It became a symbol of hope for the protesters in Hong Kong political protests)
9. How did Hong Kongers see Pepe?
(A funny face, versatile enough to become anything they wanted it to be)
10. What does the video say about the history and meaning of swastika?
(It is considered sacred in certain Eurasian religion, that symbolizes good fortune and wellbeing, whereas in Western countries it became a symbol of hate)

Then a short group discussion about the 5 questions of their opinions about the Pepe case that they have thought about at home, divide the students to groups of 3 or 4 for this:

1. What do you think about Pepe the Frog?
2. How do you feel about the discussion of copyrights when it comes to memes?
Should memes be allowed to spread freely, or does everybody have exclusive rights to the memes they have created?
3. The discussion about Pepe the Frog as a hate symbol was taking place in the United States. Do you think it affected whether people used it or not in Finland? Would you still use Pepe in Finland since the context is different, or is the meme “ruined” everywhere?
4. What can people in social media do to combat the spread of harmful or misleading memes, while still respecting freedom of expression?
5. What can individuals do to be critical consumers of memes and online content in general? How can you know the difference between humor and harmful intent?

2. The difference between misinformation and disinformation

Spreading misinformation is not necessarily done on purpose, but it is nevertheless spreading harmful fake information. Disinformation, on the other hand, is spread on purpose and the spreader tries to cause harm by their actions. Teach the students the difference between the terms with the following slide:

MISINFORMATION VS. DISINFORMATION

- Both are false or inaccurate information
- Misinformation can sometimes be spread *by accident*: One might imagine that a fact is accurate and share it forward, therefore spreading misinformation
- Disinformation is *intentionally* spread false information – there are usually motives or ideologies behind wanting to create or share false information intentionally
- Both mis- and disinformation can be spread via memes

Source: American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/misinformation-disinformation>

3. A video about memes spreading misinformation (15 min)

Show students the video “Memes Are to Make You Laugh, But What if They Spread Disinformation?” by The Quint on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO4-5KNvEY>

Then, show students these questions. Then it is recommended to watch the video again, pausing at the red marks. Tell the students to write down the answers to each question.

Follow-up questions:

1. What kind of harmful content has been spread through memes? (Pause at 0:45)
(Political propaganda, homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, conspiracy theories)
2. Memes are a good way to spread disinformation because they lack... (Pause at 1:36)
(Authority and accountability)
3. Why are memes so easy to create nowadays? (Pause at 2:15)

(The tools to create them on your smartphone (while remaining anonymous)).

4. Why would it be important to moderate memes? (Pause at 3:06)

(They can spread false information and hate without anyone being accountable)

5. What is the problem with using AI for moderating memes? (Pause at 3:44)

(The AI cannot tell what's problematic and what is not before it is clearly defined)

6. What is the challenge regarding memes? (Pause at 3.55)

(Separating the fun from the misinformation)

4. Critical meme analysis (35-40 min)

Now, students get to analyze some memes found online where there is some type of agenda behind it, and/or mis-/disinformation is being spread.

There are two ways of doing this:

1. If your students are very independent, you can give them more responsibility in this, and have them go dig around the internet (for example Instagram, X) for them to find a meme they are interested in analyzing. However, you should give them some topics to choose from; For example climate change, Covid-19 pandemic, a political conflict, or other quite recent topics on the internet that there is some controversial content about. You can also give them help by suggesting some hashtags that can be useful for finding content.

2. The other option is that you think of some recent topics that have sparked a lot of memes online, and find some memes for the students to choose from. One good platform for finding misleading memes is <https://www.snopes.com/> . They fact check news, and viral images/videos, including memes.

Depending on your class and what you prefer, you can either have the students do this independently or in groups. No matter what, at the latest after the analysis there should be group discussions in groups of 3 about the outcomes of the analysis.

Before this activity, to make it as effective as possible, some useful ways and websites of fact-checking memes should be introduced to students:

- 1. Reverse image search:** Looking for the image/images on the meme from the reverse image search, in order to find the original image
- 2. Checking possible quotes:** Often, if there are quotes represented in the meme, for example from famous people, they can be misleading, fake or out of context. It is useful to do research online whether this person has indeed said that or not.
- 3. Checking the date:** Memes often come and go fast, and therefore, if the meme is old, the information on it could be outdated. It should be checked whether the information is relevant (still), or if there are any further updates.
- 4. Fact-checking websites:** When performing a critical analysis to a meme, some fact-checking websites, such as **Snopes** (<https://www.snopes.com/>) and **FactCheck.org** (<https://www.factcheck.org/>) can be useful. Both of those websites, when searching with the word meme, show countless results that could be useful when doing the critical analysis.

The questions for critical analysis of the memes:

1. What is the main message or joke of the meme? Explain in your own words.
2. Are there any intertextual or cultural references, is there any prior knowledge needed to understand the meme?
3. Who do you think made this meme?
4. Try to see whether you can find any similar memes on the internet. Is it a remix, a new version of some other meme? In what ways has it been used in other remixes, are they about the same topic or different topics?
5. What is the target audience?

6. How might different people interpret the meme differently?
7. What do you think are the motives behind creating this meme? Is it designed to entertain the viewer, inform them, or persuade them?
8. Is the meme's tone positive, or is it perhaps negative in some way?
9. Does the meme represent any people or groups of people? If yes, is it respectful/disrespectful towards them?
10. Does the meme enforce any stereotypes or spread misinformation?
11. How can I be a critical reader in this situation? How could I fact check this, and how did I end up fact-checking it?

Lesson 5: Meme factory

Goals of the lesson

- Students learn how to create their own memes, first about a “lighter” topic with assistance, for example with the help of templates/images, topics and possibly help questions to get them started.
- Students get to choose a more “serious” topic from a list of topics and start creating a meme of it in class, then continue at home if needed

1. Creating own memes with an online game (15 min)

First students should create memes about something a little more lighthearted (for example lighter school issues/jokes on student life): This game can be easily played with <https://makeitmeme.com/>. It is a game where you can create a private lobby and then

each player gets the same/different meme template and must write a caption in the given time. Then students vote on the best one and get points; or points can be turned off, whatever works best for your group.

2. Creating opinionated memes (45 min)

Now that the students have warmed up with a lighter topic, it would be time to practice some influencing with memes: The students get to create their own memes about some social issue. One tool for creating the memes is **imgflip.com** (<https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>), where it is easy and fast to create memes based on popular templates.

It is useful to do some brainstorming before creating the final memes. Students can create a total of one to three memes, in case they get excited and want to make more than just one. It is important to remind the students that they are not allowed to create anything offensive or spread any false information, and they need to write down the source. Once again, students can be creative and use their own ideas, but a list of topics is useful to help those who might have trouble coming up with a topic. Here are some suggestions of topics:

climate change

the financial situation of students

the increasing price of food

the services/free time activities in our home city

normalizing talking about mental health issues

equality

diversity

healthcare

phone addiction

Lesson 6: The great meme exhibition

Goals of the lesson:

- Sharing the memes students have created with the class: giving constructive feedback to others, discussing the memes created
- Reflecting what we have learned during the lessons
- Giving feedback to the teacher about the lessons

1. Meme exhibition and giving feedback to others (25 min)

All the memes created by the students should be printed out and put on the walls. Students are given post it notes and pens, and they can walk around the class looking at the memes created and give (positive) comments to each other.

2. Gallery walk: Reflecting what we have learned during the lessons (25 min)

Preparations: Have five flip charts around classroom for this, and each flip chart has one question on it. Students go around in five groups, doing reflection and writing down what they have learned during the lessons. At the end, when all groups have been to all flip charts, each group presents what is written on the chart where they are currently at.

Questions for the flip charts:

- What are memes?
- Characteristics of (successful) memes
- How can memes be used in positive ways in the society?
- What are some negative aspects/dangers of memes?
- How can we be critical meme consumers and creators? (consider information, copyrights, privacy etc)

3. Feedback and self-reflection about the package/lessons (15 min)

Gather self-assessment and feedback about the lessons. Print a form for each student, answer options on a Likert Scale (1-5, 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree).

Self-reflection (1=Completely disagree, 5=completely agree)

1. I learned well what memes are

1 2 3 4 5

2. I learned how memes can have an impact on society, positively and negatively

1 2 3 4 5

3. I learned to critically analyze memes

1 2 3 4 5

4. I learned how to create memes ethically

1 2 3 4 5

5. I participated equally and did my part in group tasks

1 2 3 4 5

Feedback about the lessons (1=Completely disagree, 5=completely agree)

1. Instructions and teaching were clear

1 2 3 4 5

2. Difficulty level of tasks was suitable

1 2 3 4 5

3. Tasks were fun

1 2 3 4 5

4. This material package was overall useful

1 2 3 4 5

5. Memes should be taught in school

1 2 3 4 5

Any feedback on how to improve this teaching material further?
