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Transforming a school into Hogwarts: storification of classrooms and students' social behaviour

Isabella Aura ^a, Lobna Hassan ^b and Juho Hamari ^a

^aFaculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland;

^bDepartment of Industrial Engineering & Management, Lappeenranta University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland

ABSTRACT

Educators are continuously exploring ways to enhance the academic potential of students while fostering a positive social atmosphere within classrooms. To meet these various curricular and interpersonal objectives, teachers are increasingly utilising educational storification in order to engage students and positively support their social relationships. However, research still lacks in terms of how storification impacts students' social behaviour and communities. With grounded theory methods, and data from a 10-day ethnographic fieldwork, participatory observations, interviews with 11 educational staff and focus groups with 79 students at a middle school employing a Harry Potter theme, this study indicates that storification can strengthen the school community and hinder students' antisocial behaviour. The storified learning environment formed a shared interest at the school, which facilitated further friendship formations and sense of belonging, however, careful considerations on social cliques and certain norms the selected story potentially delivers are called for.

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Storification; social behaviour; learning environment; classroom design; themed classroom

1. Introduction

Classrooms and schools contain multidimensional social contexts where students are required to pursue social, academic and personal goals (Juvonen & Murdock, 1995; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Sense of belonging, friendships, or the lack thereof, can have a major impact on students' well-being and learning during childhood and beyond (Lee, 2014; North et al., 2019). Interpersonal problems and experiences of exclusion may even be the main reasons why teenagers drop out of school (McDermott et al., 2019; Terry, 2008). To hinder bullying and antisocial behaviour in schools, educational professionals have made continuous efforts to build socially sustainable environments for children to learn and grow in. Today, as games and interactive technologies are a regular part of youths' lives, gameful approaches are increasingly employed in classrooms

CONTACT Isabella Aura  isabella.aura@tuni.fi  Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere 33100, Finland; Lobna Hassan  @lobnahassan_

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by teachers. These approaches differently affect not only students' academic engagement but also their social circles.

One of these emerging gameful approaches (often considered part of gamification (Hamari, 2019)) to education is storification. Storification aims to widen the reach of storytelling by, for example, communicating and creating a narrative in an interactive way (Deterding, 2016) as well as reinforcing the delivery of story messages and values (Hassan et al., 2019). The levels of educational storification are broad, as previous research shows various digital (Dickey, 2011; Prestopnik & Tang, 2015), physical (Jenkins, 2004; Prins et al., 2017) and hybrid (Akkerman et al., 2009; Sadik, 2008) implementations. While there's no conclusive evidence on storification's long-term effects on, for example, student engagement or learning, these studies show a positive impact on motivation (Dickey, 2011), retention of academic content (Prins et al., 2017) and sense-making processes (Akkerman et al., 2009). As the utilisation of storification in classrooms continues to increase, we are faced with a research and practice challenge as little is known of, particularly, storification's influence on students' social communities and behaviour. While immersion in imagined, storified social realities could have many benefits, including the ones listed earlier, how does it impact the everyday social practice and culture in the classroom, or how does it shift social behaviour among students? Does it create common and shared realities between close social groups, or lead to isolation in one's own head?

This study showcases a school from the southern US, where the learning environment for 7th and 8th grade students is holistically transformed to resemble the wizarding school of *Hogwarts* from the *Harry Potter* (HP) series. Notably, the Harry Potter franchise is a subject of contention due to controversial comments by the author of the series on transgender rights (Brooks, 2020; Sachdeva, 2022), which became politically weaponised, not only in social discussions but towards Western ideals of inclusion in and of themselves (Fieldstadt, 2022). This shows how even fictional stories are not neutral properties, and that potentially any story selected for storification carries with it some partiality and political properties. The transformation of the school in question took place independent of this research effort of it and it started at a time when the franchise was not yet under significant debate as it is now, and was perceived to be politically neutral by the majority of the school attendees at the time of implementation. Our point of departure in examining said school is not to (de)legitimise the HP franchise, as that is not the matter under study, but to examine this school's transformation and its impact on students' behaviour as will be elaborated on further. Storification through HP at the school was approached from a fandom vantage point, where the teachers and students, as fans, picked and chose which of its messages to reinforce, redesign, or throw out. Together they aimed to construct an imagined magical universe where they all felt at home, regardless of personal backgrounds (Aura et al., 2021a) and regardless of how said universe would then be a true-to-text translation of the universe in the HP franchise.

To learn how this extensive implementation of storification influenced students' interpersonal relationships, social behaviour and experiences of bullying, a 10-day ethnographic fieldwork was employed in the school community. Fieldwork consisted of interviews with four teachers and seven other educational staff, focus groups with 79 students and participatory observations within storified classes, which were examined through grounded theory methods with the aim to answer the research question of: *How do students experience their social communities (e.g. forming friendships, bullying,*

solidarity) in storified classes? Such a study is necessary in order to understand the benefits and detriments storification holds, especially, from the perspective of students' social relationships, as to utilise it fully in educational contexts. Noteworthy, this paper is part of a larger research project conducted in this school (see Aura et al., 2021a), and this particular manuscript is adapted and expanded from a working paper presented at a conference (Aura et al., 2021b).

2. Background

2.1 Students' social behaviour within classrooms

Social constructs, such as social status, sense of belonging and experiences of being bullied strongly impact students' relatedness to school, motivation and learning outcomes (Cemalcilar, 2010; Lee, 2014). In order to pursue fundamental needs of acceptance and belonging, students are likely to become, or be encouraged to become, members of multiple communities in their school and society (Lave & Wenger, 1991), for example being part of a project group in class, sports clubs, or a friend-group with whom to have lunch and socialise. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), these communities of practice facilitate learning within them, pursuing interests as well as passions. They may even shape members' identities, interactions and gradually form a novel use of language, which is specific only for said community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This change of language may also serve as an intermediary of different social structures, as argued in Bernstein's code theory (2003).

Within communities and groups, antisocial behaviour often emerges. Social exclusion, bullying and disharmony remain still as one of the most pervasive problems schools face every day (Bell & Willis, 2016; Cretu & Morandau, 2022), despite the continuous endeavours of educational professionals to curb such negative social behaviour within classrooms. Teachers create the learning environment, social climate and conditions for students to act in – they construct classrooms' social atmosphere through the pedagogy delivery and social norms and rules (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Varghese et al., 2019) that, at best, should aim to support and promote learning, social interaction and mutual respect in classrooms. Hence, as experimental methods such as gamification and storification are increasingly integrated in teaching, examining their effects on students' social behaviour and communities is called for.

2.2 Storification of education

To increase the appeal of teaching to students and enhance learning outcomes, educators have increasingly employed emerging gameful and playful approaches, such as serious games (Connolly et al., 2012; Vos et al., 2011), gamification (Hamari, 2019; Landers, 2019; Nicholson, 2015), and simulations (Rumore et al., 2016; Rutten et al., 2012) into their pedagogy and learning environments. One of these approaches is adding stories, storytelling and role play to teaching, which teachers and educational professionals have long utilised to make learning more relevant for students (Cakici & Bayir, 2012; Heyward, 2010). In his seminal paper, while Nicholson (2015) did not explicitly mention storification or narratives as a tool of gameful engagement in education, he specifically

emphasises the importance of meaning and purposefulness in the approach we employ to create engagement in any context. Without such meaning, most approaches to engagement would fail to meet their objectives long term (Nicholson, 2015).

Different terminologies have been used to describe these practices around the use of stories and storytelling in education, such as, but not limited to; story- and narrative-based learning, as well as narrative-centred learning environments (e.g. Dettori & Paiva, 2009; McQuiggan et al., 2008; Rowe et al., 2011). Recently, storification emerged as a term connected, not only to storytelling strategies in education, but additionally to broader strategies of engagement online and offline. Moreover, whereas gamification and serious games are more commonly employed in more direct pedagogical purposes aiming to improve learning outcomes, storification often takes the form of a more holistic approach of (re-)framing learning situations for the overall support of education (Madsen et al., 2020).

Storification refers to the holistic use of stories in a way that creates and communicates a narrative to its audience in an engrossing and pervasive manner (Madsen et al., 2020). It endeavours to wrap activities inside a story, giving students a chance to learn and create information within said story (Deterding, 2016). Storification aims to go beyond storytelling by letting students comprehensively experience and act out in stories. It can and has been used, for example, as an educational tool through a mobile application (Akkerman et al., 2009), or as part of learning environments through immersive storytelling processes (Jantakoon et al., 2019). Beyond its positive aims, storification can also be perceived as confusing in terms of fictional elements of the story, when fiction and reality can't be easily discerned (Prins et al., 2017), unsupportive of collaborative work (Sadik, 2008) or alienating to students highly interested in the subject matter (Prestopnik et al., 2017). In terms of story selection, storification might reinforce unwanted behaviour patterns such as classroom disruption or misconduct (Aura et al., 2021a) or it can create misperceptions if students do not identify or find resonance with the narrative (Harrison, 2020). However, research yet notably lacks the knowledge on how storification can be implemented in formal schooling, and how it can be seen through the lens of social interactions.

Usually, a physical classroom learning environment in Western contexts for minor students is composed of a variation of desks in rows, and relatively plain walls and furniture. Within such classrooms, different aspects of education are enabled: curriculum-delivery, pedagogy, a learning atmosphere, social behaviour, and social structures amongst students, and between students and teachers (Bernstein, 2003; Varghese et al., 2019). Studies show that classroom design parameters can explain some of the variation in students' school experience (Barrett et al., 2015). Physical aspects of classrooms, such as furniture and aesthetics, contribute to the comfort level of students and therefore learning and teaching outcomes (Barrett et al., 2015; Cheryan et al., 2014). Hence, modifying a classroom environment can and does have an influence on students' engagement and behaviour (Barrett et al., 2015; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010), which is why it is plausible for educators to positively influence learning outcomes and curb behavioural problems within schools through the way classrooms are designed.

3. Methodology

The aim of this case study is to examine how students experience their social communities in storified classes. A qualitative approach was employed in order to gather authentic,

nanced knowledge on such a complex phenomenon as students' social behaviour. To understand the experience, feelings and attitudes of the study participants in an exploratory, rather than a confirmatory manner, grounded theory methods with a constructivist approach were employed (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.1 Case study description

This case study took place in an elementary-middle school (K-8), attended by 350 students, 19 teachers and nine other educational staff. The school is located in the southern USA, in an area that is lower than average in its socio-economic status and where there is a higher-than-average risk for domestic issues, as described by the school's educational staff and parents. To create an engaging, comfortable and home-like school experience for students, the teachers had transformed one hallway, and the four classrooms in it into Hogwarts, the wizarding school of the Harry Potter (HP) series. The transformation of the physical space was deployed through paintings, murals and decorations, furniture, objects and props fitting to the Harry Potter theme, as can be seen in [Figure 1](#).

The transformation of learning environments was not only in the physical infrastructure of the classrooms, but in teachers' pedagogical decision-making and practices. The story of Harry Potter was directly incorporated in teaching through different methods, such as reading the Harry Potter books as part of curriculum, watching the movies, school events, classroom assignments, group works, multimedia tasks, as well as indirectly via a hidden curriculum (Jerald, 2006) that teaches the values and morals the story delivers. Through the holistic change of learning environments, novel pedagogical practices and delivery of hidden curriculum, storification was both directly and indirectly affecting students' daily lives, including their social relationships and behaviour.

3.2 Participants and data collection

This study examined students' social behaviour in the school's Harry Potter hallway, which includes a total of four classrooms for the 7th and 8th grades, taught by four teachers. Said four teachers, in addition to six other educational staff and the school principal, were interviewed individually for this study. Furthermore, 79 students from 7th and 8th grades (12–14-year-olds), attending those classrooms, participated in focus groups which consisted of three to six students, the average being five per group. The average age of the students was 12.8 years ($SD = 0.75$). The majority of them were White (89%

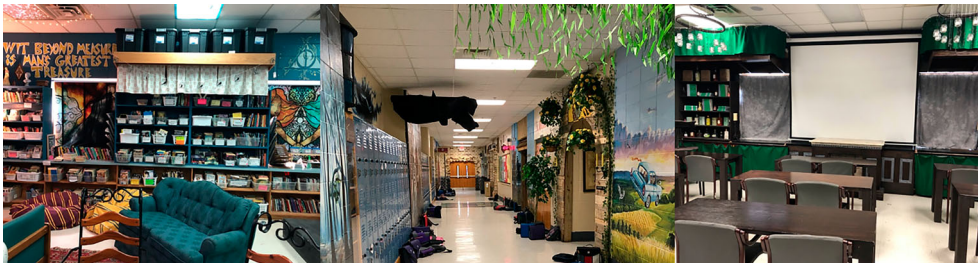


Figure 1. Storified Hogwarts classrooms and hallway.

White, 11% Hispanic), and almost half of them were boys (49% boys, 51% girls). Additionally, three parents and nearly 30 school graduates were interviewed in order to get a holistic understanding of the studied phenomenon, however, the data gathered from them was utilised only as supplementary material due to the study's focus on current students and teachers. [Table 1](#) demonstrates the details of participants and collected data.

In addition to interviews and focus groups, data was gathered during ethnographic fieldwork by participatory observations in the storified classes for 10 days during school hours, in several classes, as well as outside of classes, such as during breaks and lunchtimes. Data was collected by note taking, audio recording and photographs. After initial participatory observations, theoretical sampling, as part of grounded theory (Creswell, 2012), resulted in adding questions in the interview guide for educational staff and students. The 11 educational staff interviews lasted approximately from 10 to 45 min, and the 15 focus groups lasted an average of 25 min. In order to create a comfortable and open atmosphere, students formed the focus groups with the help of their teachers, so that they consisted of people comfortable with each other, minimising the risk of potentially placing a bullied student in the same group as the person(s) bullying them. All data were collected in fall 2019.

The requirement for ethical approval was waived by the Ethics Committee of the Tampere Region as the study involves no risks to the subjects and the students' guardians were informed of the study with a letter, in which the study was outlined and the guardians could indicate if they wished for their child not to participate. Additionally, it was ensured that the minors who take part in the study understand what the research is about and what participation requires of them by taking into consideration subjects' age and stage of development. Overall, participants were assured that participating in the data collection was entirely voluntary, confidential, anonymous, and had no influence on their job or academic performance, and they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point without further explanation. With that, four students decided not to participate in the focus groups. Regardless of participation, all teachers and students received a small gift in the form of a chocolate or candy.

3.3 Analysis

This case study employed grounded theory methods (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), based on a constructivist approach (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011), which is an appropriate method to get close to participants' empirical world and explore the

Table 1. Breakdown of participants and data collected.

	Number of people	Time	Transcript sheets
Observations	≈ 100	10 days; ≈ 50–60 h	40
Educational staff			
Hogwarts hallway teachers	4		
Other teachers and educational staff	7		
In total	11	226 min	106
Students			
	15 groups		
7th graders	41		
8th graders	38		
In total	79	361.81 min	463
In total	≈ 130	≈ 70h	609

emerging themes. The analysis process included coding (initial, focused and theoretical) (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011), constant comparison (data with data, data with codes, codes with codes, codes with categories and categories with categories), as well as memo writing and sorting, in order to elaborate ideas and thoughts about the data (Creswell, 2012). However, the process was not linear and required going back and forth between data, codes and final categories.

Two of the authors conducted the early stages of coding in the qualitative data analysis tool MAXQDA, where all the data on the school community's social behaviour, interpersonal relationships and bullying experiences were identified. Initial coding of this relevant data revealed 55 codes, which were extracted with focused coding by connecting and comparing codes into categories. This stage generated the core concept of *storified learning environment* as well as 12 codes of, for example, *shared interest*, *sense of family* and *playful testing of boundaries*, which are presented in more detail in the findings section, in Table 2. In the last stage of theoretical coding, through establishing relationships between focused codes, categories of *actions/interactions with the storified learning environment*, *strengthened school community* and *changed negative behaviour expressions* were formed. Finally, based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory paradigm, we present our findings in phases of *conditions*, *actions/interactions*, *consequences* and *outcomes* (see Table 2).

4. Findings

The constructivist approach (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011) and the paradigm phases (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) resulted in a grounded theory model (see Table 2), which provides insights on how the students experienced the storified learning environment through the lens of their social communities. The model shows how the condition of a storified environment facilitates different types of students' actions, which further results in emerging consequences that precede final outcomes from storification in schools. In alignment with the basis of grounded theory, the aim is not to present strict causal relationships, but rather describe the factors that facilitated certain consequences and outcomes in our data in an exploratory way (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The model encapsulates how the students acted and interacted with the core concept of our study, *storified learning environment*, which also served as the condition for the

Table 2. Grounded theory model of the students' social behaviour in storified learning environment.

Conditions	Actions/interactions with the storified learning environment	Consequences	Outcomes
Storified learning environment (described in 3.1)	Shared interest Identification and resemblance with the story Recognition from outsiders Communicative language	<u>Collaboration</u> <u>Sense of family</u> <u>Sense of belonging</u> <u>Friendship formation</u> <u>Support</u> <u>Change in bullying</u> <u>Teacher interventions</u> <u>Playful testing of boundaries</u>	Strengthened school community Changed negative behaviour expressions

emerging consequences. The consequences were grouped into two outcome categories of *strengthened school community* and *changed negative behaviour* expressions, which are discussed and described through data quotes from observations (OBS), focus groups (FG) with students and interviews (INTW) with teachers in the following subsections.

4.1 Storified environment and interaction with it

The core concept of our study and the condition for the resulting outcomes was the school's unique *storified learning environment*, in which students acted and interacted with their social communities. Storification at the school took place in a variety of ways. The theme of Harry Potter was introduced and became prevalent in most school activities, as part of both the pedagogical decision-making as well as the physical environment. Through the reading of the Harry Potter books and utilising them in subjects such as English and literature, teachers familiarised students with the series and the theme around them. For some students this familiarisation extended also outside school by watching the Harry Potter movies at home, collecting merchandise or visiting the HP theme parks, facilitating feelings of fandom. Most of the students, 44 out of 79, did identify as HP fans, 14 felt neutral towards it, 14 said they were not fans but were not opposed to the theme, and seven did not state their opinion during focus groups.

In addition to reading the HP books, teachers incorporated the series in other related pedagogical activities. Group work, projects and discussions were common methods to process characters, plotline and events of the books, in order to attain different learning objectives. For example, the observation data shows that during grammar lessons, the English teacher would use the HP series in teaching new words such as "profound" and "intuition" through sentences of "we were thinking that Potter book profoundly" and "Professor Trelawney in Potter books had intuition" (OBS6). During science classes, the teacher occasionally referred to some chemicals as magic potions to get the attention of the students before detailing what they actually were (INTW3). Gradually, the series not only supported the required academic goals, but evolved into a *shared interest*, and a common conversational point between students. Students at large enjoyed studying in the unique environment and engaged in HP related assignments, whether they were affiliated strongly with HP fandom or not.

Beyond curricular purposes, HP was employed in other playful activities at the school. One of the activities teachers devised was a Hogwarts house sorting quiz, which was a playful personality test that sorted students into one of the four Hogwarts houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw or Slytherin. Each house represents a different set of qualities: Gryffindor values bravery and daringness, Hufflepuff endorses patience and fairness, Ravenclaw involves curious and intelligent students, and Slytherins are recognised as ambitious and resourceful. Such a test had no effect on students' grades or academic performance but was a way for students to have fun and connect with the story and the environment around them. Nonetheless, the majority of the students remembered the results of the quiz quite clearly, and still enjoyed discussing the questions it had and the percentages they got, although the quiz had been taken months prior to the focus groups:

Student #73: My Slytherin was like 50 percent.

Student #11: Jeez! My Slytherin was like 5 percent!

Student #35: Really?

Student #55: You're a Hufflepuff?

Student #11: Yeah, I'm a Hufflepuff.

Student #55: I was like the only Ravenclaw- there was like only three of us who were a Ravenclaw and the rest were Hufflepuffs.

Although the school did not group the students according to Hogwarts houses, the results of the sorting quiz had undoubtedly stuck in students' minds, creating discussions and perhaps leading into categorising of friends. Students described that while the sorting quiz had been mostly for fun, it had facilitated social connection with other students, when finding out which house others are identified as:

Student #16: My friend (friend's name), he'll run through [the hallway] and he'll just hear this one person just say: "I'm from Hufflepuff". He'll be like: "Get over here, we're Hufflepuff too!"

Perhaps this is an unsurprising experience given that the majority of the school's 7th and 8th graders had been sorted into Hufflepuff, the house of loyal friends and diligence. Students believed that everyone had friends in the school, and although stating that "everybody gets along with everybody" (FG4,8,10,14), students felt it was natural that smaller groups of friends started to gradually form over the years. It is possible that the HP theme reinforced such grouping yet its effects remain hard to discern. Perhaps via a sense of identification with the school environment, HP or fandom, students began to utilise characters, events and vocabulary from Harry Potter to *communicate* their experiences and feelings to others. For example, when discussing incidents of past bullying or reflecting on teachers and classmates, some students employed certain characters from the series to describe their experiences:

Student #46: I want to tell you all about my bullying experience: I'm gonna call him Voldemort [the main antagonist of the HP series] ... Because he's like Voldemort, he's just evil. So, Voldemort would always ... he wasn't so much of a physical bully as he was a mental bully.

Also the observation data shows how students' casual discussions occasionally included HP characters. For example, when talking about godparents, one student said to another that "Sirius (Harry's godfather) seems like a cool uncle", while the other responded with "my godfather is kind of like that" (OBS4). Teachers also noted this student identification with the characters and *resemblance* with the story theme and used it themselves when communicating about, for example, negative situations:

Teacher #8: They connect with Harry [Potter], because for a lot of these kids school is their safe place, their comfort zone, and where they belong. I think a lot of our kids live in a situation similar to Privet Drive [Harry's "home"], unfortunately. Or there's just a lot of difficulties at home.

Here, the teacher refers to 4 Privet Drive, the home of Harry Potter's aunt and uncle, in which he spent his childhood in poor home conditions, always stating that Hogwarts was more of a home for him than 4 Privet Drive ever was. These points of resemblance were

considered important when aiming to deliver the moral underpinnings of the story as the students at this school had similar life challenges as Harry and teachers hoped the school would do for them the same it did for Harry.

Due to how unique the school is, it received increased media attention and even acknowledgements from the HP franchise. People, such as reporters and visitors from other schools, made the students feel proud and happy about their school. Some students felt that already this recognition and interest received from outsiders was one of the main aspects that enhanced their school experience (FG3-5,10,13):

Interviewer: What do you think about visitors like me coming here? How does that make you feel about your school?

Student #26: Proud, I guess.

Student #54: It's very neat.

Student #77: No one knew about our school before all this [storification] happened because we were a really small school compared to other schools, so it kind of made us known.

Thus, the selected theme of Harry Potter employed in the learning environment emerged in students' school experience and social communities in various ways. Not only through the appearance of the classrooms, but also through pedagogical methods and supplement material, such as the house quiz, teachers created an original environment for the students to interact in and experience their interpersonal relationships and schooling. Overall, the storified learning environment fostered a sense of recognition and identity through the employed story and theme of Harry Potter, as well as facilitated shared interests and communicative language in the school community. However, it is important to note the pitfalls of especially communicative language, which potentially could endorse social cliques and speaking ill of others, as some students utilised, for example, unpopular characters from HP to describe their teachers and peers during the focus groups.

4.2 Consequences and outcomes in terms of strengthened school community

According to the students and the educational staff the *school community got stronger* as a partial outcome of interacting and connecting with the storified learning environment. For an outside observer, the social atmosphere in the school community appeared relaxed and cheerful, both during and outside of classroom activities. In the focus groups, students described the school as a "cool" (FG3,6,9,12-15), "welcoming" (FG1,8) or "fun" (FG1-4,10,11,13,14) place. Students noted that the experienced atmosphere was partly due to the school being small, and partly to teachers' effort in creating an exciting and collaborative environment through the design change of storified classrooms. Additionally, a great portion of the students had been at the school since kindergarten, hence their relationships had possibly developed already at a young age, creating a *sense of family*:

Student #47: It's like everyone's friends with everybody and everyone knows that. So, if you're friends with someone, you expect them to talk to everyone else, because everyone at first kind of sticks up for each other and we're all so close. So, it's like a family.

Storification played a major part in creating these feelings of community and family. Through an extensive effort to create an inspiring, intriguing and comfortable place for students to learn and grow in, students saw that devotion and appreciated their special learning environment. Classrooms were not only seen as decorations and paintings, but as part of a bigger picture, facilitating even motivation and *sense of belonging*:

Student #79: I think that the [storified] classrooms make kids feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves (. . .) just having it there in general makes kids want to go to school and interact with things.

Students described that the Harry Potter theme “got their school closer” (FG4,10), *forming friendships*, collective memories, shared experiences and common talking topics, especially for students who identified as Harry Potter fans. While discussing friendships and forming new ones, students saw improvements in their communication after the transformation in the classrooms took place:

Student #31: Since we’re all Harry Potter fans, it helps us communicate better. Because we know what we’re talking about, when usually people don’t read lots of Harry Potter books, and they’re like: “What are we talking about?” So, it’s a lot better to make friends.

Interviewer: So you think that helped; finding new friends through Hogwarts stuff?

Student #42: Yeah, definitely helped.

Student #37: Because you always have something to talk about. Even if you don’t know what to talk about, just bring up Harry Potter, because everybody knows about it.

Student #8: I made friends with this girl named (her name) because of Harry Potter. It was last year when we started reading the second book and she was like: “Oh yeah, I know everything about Harry Potter”. And I was like: “Really? I really like Harry Potter”. And she said: “Yeah”. And then we’re friends.

According to the students, school staff had been an essential part in facilitating students’ interpersonal relationships during school hours. Students often referred to their teachers as “caring” (FG1,2,7,9,10), “fun” or “funny” (FG2-4,6-10,12-14). They also gave credit to the school principal for being understanding and “letting the teachers decorate their rooms” (FG7). Students felt the educational and emotional *support* they were able to receive from their teachers, further strengthening the bond of the school community:

Interviewer: What do you think about your teachers?

Student #37: They’re awesome. They’re not normal teachers as you can probably tell. They make students feel happy. Happy here at home. For some people, they don’t have people they can go to at home and when they come here you can always talk to your teacher and they’re always there for you no matter what. They just make people happier.

Student #31: Makes it [school] a lot more comfortable because they’re not going to make you uncomfortable when you have to ask anything. They’re not going to be mad at you for asking questions twice.

Together, the support and collaboration between students and teachers, as well as the common interests towards the Harry Potter theme, helped in friendship formation and in the positive orientation of the school’s social atmosphere. It is possible that students who identified as HP fans had a stronger bond with the teachers, albeit this remains hard to

discern without closer investigations. However, the originality of the storified classrooms had notably lifted the spirits of educational staff by enhancing their work environment, reflecting on students' level of comfort as well.

4.3 Consequences and outcomes in terms of changed negative behaviour expressions

Through engaging with the novel learning environment, teachers reported a *change in students' negative behaviour* for the better during the last few years, approximately at the same time as storification had gradually taken place. Discussing antisocial behaviour with the students and educational staff, an explicit, recurrent note emerged from the interviews and focus groups: there was "no bullying in the school at the moment" (FG1,4,8,13-15; INTW1,4). One of the teachers who had worked in the Harry Potter hallway, described that the hallway had previously had a lot of discipline problems, such as fights and bullying. However, today, that has not happened in a while, and the teacher believed it was due to the perceived pride students have with their school:

Teacher #2: There used to be discipline problems all the time in that [7th and 8th grade] hallway, because you had older kids and they're getting to the age where they're close to being able to drop out of school legally. And so, a lot of times with that age, you'll see them that they're just shutting down, because they're getting ready to just drop out. And then there would be fights. When I was [a teacher] in that hall, we would see fights often with the bigger kids. And that has not happened in a while. There's a lot more ownership- I think the kids have an ownership with the school and more of a pride with it.

Similarly, many interviewees recalled bullying incidents from the past, stating that "it was years ago" (FG6) or "we've had bullying in the past" (FG2,3,7,9; INTW4). The majority of the students expressed having a close relationship with their teachers and the principal, trusting that the school staff and *teachers* would *intervene* on possible bullying incidents, stating that the teachers "do not tolerate bullying" (FG5,8).

Nonetheless, compatible with the observation data, students also talked of relatively less serious antisocial behaviour, such as "joking around" (FG8,9,12) or "picking on or teasing others" (FG4,8) which students did not characterise as bullying. However, this *playful testing of boundaries* might sometimes have gone too far, creating differing opinions of what is considered as bullying and what is not:

Student #32: There's just a lot of joking around. I mean, some people get hurt, but they get over it.

Student #72: Yeah, they get us. Honestly, it's OK. You know, there's some people that just, you know, take it too far.

Student #32: Nothing serious. We never have a problem with it.

Student #72: Because we all bully each other and we take it as jokes. We don't take it seriously.

This playful testing of boundaries perhaps indicates that while serious bullying and misconduct has significantly decreased due to teachers' interventions and storification, it still occurs and is expressed in milder, and possibly more socially acceptable ways. In the focus groups the individual views and experiences of students varied, but the

noted change in bullying, however, was significant for the larger community and supported many aspects of schooling, such as feelings of community and belonging.

5. Discussion

Our findings, elucidated through the grounded theory model (Table 2), showcase how the students at the studied school experienced their social communities within the storified classrooms. Fundamentally, storification was implemented in the school in hopes to provide a comfortable, home-like place for students to learn in, and provide engaging physical learning environments and an accepting social atmosphere. Teachers had gradually worked towards these goals, as students felt comfortable with their environment and described the social atmosphere as “welcoming” and “fun”, or even with words such as “family”. These perceived feelings of social support, belonging and community can have long-term effects on students’ lives, for example increasing interest towards further education (Ryan & Patrick, 2001) and preventing future harmful behaviour, such as drug use (Schaps & Solomon, 2003), thus addressing the achievement gap of children from lower socio-economic classes (Bernstein, 2003; Workman, 2021). Furthermore, creative and playful spaces facilitate versatile meaningful social situations, where students can engage with existing affinity groups (Nicholson, 2015) and learn social skills more than they presumably would have learned in traditionally designed classrooms. These spaces could have further fostered students’ academic interests since social classrooms and social skills positively correlate with academic achievement (Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997).

According to our findings, the shared interests towards the Harry Potter theme and collective appreciation of recognition from outsiders strengthened the school’s communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and fostered a more open environment for students to explore their social relationships. Within these communities, students employed characters and events from the HP series to communicate their experiences of, for example, prior bullying, school environment or encounters with teachers. This utilisation of collective language and codes further supported social interactions and forming of friendships or groups. According to Bernstein’s code theory (2003), this change of language may serve as an intermediary of social structures and shape adolescents’ identities and their views of the world. Especially for children coming from lower socio-economic classes, schools and smaller communities within the school can act as a strong independent force for diminishing achievement gaps through the way language is utilised and developed, and how pedagogy and social values are delivered in classrooms (Bernstein, 2003), for which storification might be an appropriate tool.

While the Harry Potter series have been varyingly utilised in education since its emergence in the late 1990s, some studies imply that perhaps educators have not harnessed the HP phenomenon to its full extent, especially when it comes to its literacy-developing potential and student inspiration and empowerment (Dempster et al., 2016; Hassan et al., 2018). However, the fundamental intention of the Harry Potter series is not to educate, but to provide entertainment, which is why their moral teachings need assessment and conscious utilisation in classrooms. For example, the sorting quiz that was used at the school to organise students into their Hogwarts houses was perceived as playful and fun, but identification with an exclusive Hogwarts house might also induce social cliques, or

even rivalry and tribalism among students (Hassan et al., 2018). Prior studies show that perceived HP house identity can empower especially shy students, provide them inclusion into a social identity group and facilitate a sense of belonging (Harrison, 2020); however, careful assessment of the series' exclusionary potential and delivery of unwanted values is called for. Additionally, the probable division between fans and non-fans should be considered while integrating popular culture stories or themes in education. In our findings, this potential separation was not visible, as both fans and non-fans, as well as students who took a neutral stance towards Harry Potter, reported similar experiences and perceptions of the storified classrooms.

5.1 Practical implications

While the Harry Potter series has recently come under fire for reasons related to gender and identity diversity as noted in the introduction of this article (Brooks, 2020; Duggan, 2021; Sachdeva, 2022), the story of the Wizarding World lives on in the imagination of many fans who now attempt to balance this fandom with inclusivity awareness. The problematic statements by the HP author have undoubtedly affected the whole franchise, and raise questions of whether attaching such a story to a formal curriculum is pedagogically or even morally right. However, any materials used as the basis of storification are probable to come under dynamic perception with contemporary discussions, as culture and societal level discourses are ever shifting. Therefore, any background material will likely face volatile shifts from what is perceived as virtuous and problematic, as happened with the HP series as well. Aware of this juxtaposition, teachers of our case study saw potential in some of the values and messages that the Harry Potter series delivers – subjects such as friendship, perseverance and growing up in a dysfunctional family (Lennard, 2007). Through both physical classroom design and pedagogical decision-making, students interacted within the storified learning environment holistically, facilitating feelings of fandom in terms of the Harry Potter series, and created shared interest amongst students and teachers. Together, this unification of common interests, as well as the recognition from outsiders that grew feelings of pride and ownership in students, showed that storification had facilitated a great change in the school's social atmosphere and holds this same potential when implemented in other contexts.

While students' antisocial behaviour and experienced bullying had notably decreased over the last years with the gradually implemented transformation to the classrooms, storification alone is not a "magic" solution to problem behaviour, nor is the Harry Potter theme. Together, the dedication and care the teachers showed for students, systematic interventions and the delivery of the hidden curriculum, may have been the key contribution to the change. Whilst serious bullying did not occur at the time of studying the school, negative social behaviour was still manifested through "playful" teasing or picking on others. However, while it may be difficult for both students and teachers to discern various forms of bullying and antisocial behaviour, they should not be overlooked in terms of seriousness (Bell & Willis, 2016). Studies of similarly storified contexts, such as those of larps (live-action roleplays), where participants enact a story and take on different roles, have shown that even the smallest transgressions in an imagined universe can dominate the activity and impact players' e.g. sense of agency, self-esteem, or safety (Fatland & Montola, 2015), as well as autonomy (Stenros & Montola, 2017). Hence, as was recognised

at the school, bullying or any other distressing social behaviour should not be ignored under the umbrella of pretence, but rather addressed seriously so that it does not lead to real consequences. As such, it becomes notable that perhaps some of the, albeit minor, challenges of social misbehaviour that the teachers faced at the school are challenges that could also be faced by larp organisers. While our study does not extend to an examination of the school under study as a larp or through larp theory, such an examination can significantly enrich our understanding of storification and how it can be implemented.

With storification, furthermore, special attention is to be paid to carefully selected stories and the moral values they deliver (Aura et al., 2021a). In educational contexts, stories that showcase the value of education can especially be employed to provide a purpose for education for students to perform better, and to additionally transport students to different realities where they might be inclined to behave more positively (Aura et al., 2021a; Deterding, 2016), however, said stories might simultaneously and indirectly justify actions for discrimination, inequality or other unwanted behaviour if these stories are not examined critically.

We encourage schools and educational professionals to consider the features of learning environments and classroom designs, as they both affect students' social and academic behaviour (Urda & Schoenfelder, 2006). Storification may serve as an engaging tool to make school more appealing for students, but careful consideration of its consequences, design, and impact is called for. As Landers (2019) emphasises, activities that aim to gamify education, or make it more engaging, do not merely impact behaviour, but they do that through the psychological experience they provide. Without attention to said psychology and emotional reactions engendered in people by storification, the sole examination of its behavioural impact can be misleading as behavioural outcomes do not reflect what is going on inside peoples' heads. This further highlights the importance of meaningfulness and purposefulness in gamified designs (Nicholson, 2015), and by extension in storified designs.

Based on this case study, successful educational storification involves at least a meaningfully selected story and consideration of how to pedagogically deliver it, as well as cooperation, support and dedication from the school community. However, conditions and resources for implementing holistic storification differ greatly among educational institutes and professionals, hence, comprehensive criteria or recipes might not exist without further research. Nevertheless, a potential approach for teachers is to strive to familiarise themselves with topical phenomena that their students are interested in and build designs, exercises and activities around them (Dempster et al., 2016; Flutter, 2006). Overall, storification is a process similar to other playful approaches to education (e.g. Toda et al., 2019), hence it calls for clear objectives as well as iterative evaluations in order to successfully engage students both socially and academically.

6. Limitations and future research

While the selected school was particularly unique for its exceptionally holistic implementation of storification, it remains a singular case study. Nonetheless, this study elucidates some of the major interpretations of social behaviours related to and emerging from storification, and provides a point of departure for more research on educational storification.

The studied school was rather small, which could explain some aspects of, for example, the atmosphere at school. As the data gathering period was relatively short, some findings may be difficult to discern, for example, we cannot fully discern which aspects of the decreased misconduct were due to storification and which resulted from external events.

The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted by one researcher. While this may have reinforced trustful and respectful relations between the researcher and participants (Herron, 2019), it may have contributed to researcher bias. This was taken into account at different stages of the research through discussions with experienced co-authors. Results and observations were actively presented in research lectures and seminars for larger reflections.

We encourage future researchers to examine the effects of storification through pre and post implementation comparisons, preferably through mixed methods. Students' social behaviour and social communities are complex structures with many influencing factors that should be examined from many vantage points, emphasising children's own views and perceptions. Understanding the utilisation of storification in education and its effects on both students' and teachers' attitudes, behaviours and experiences can provide us significant information on how to improve schools, classrooms and pedagogy even further.

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ORCID

Isabella Aura  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9540-710X>

Lobna Hassan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6201-9159>

Juho Hamari  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6573-588X>

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