



Multicultural literature and intercultural theory in English 6

A qualitative study of teachers' experiences with multicultural literature in upper-secondary schools in Sweden

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine English language teachers' choices and uses of literary texts, and more particularly, multicultural forms of literature from an intercultural pedagogical angle. Drawing on a qualitative approach, six English teachers' experiences were explored using interviews. The interviews were semi-structured which gave the English teachers the opportunity to share their reasonings behind working interculturally with multicultural literature. The English teachers perceived both potentials and problems when dealing with multicultural literature, both of which were analysed through content analysis.

The results revealed that the English teachers made conscious decisions when choosing multicultural literature for their classes. They based their curricula on the different backgrounds and nationalities found in their classroom in order to represent voices outside of the traditional canon and mainstream culture. It was also found that the teachers were positive towards working interculturally with multicultural literature as it aided in promoting social harmony as well as negotiating conflict and new perspectives on foreign cultures and identities. However, it was also found that the English teachers experienced challenges due to several issues, such as not being an expert on a particular culture, silence among students, and censorship issues. The findings from the study indicate that teachers need to be trained on and provided with the necessary pedagogical tools on how to represent different cultures, as well as how to approach sensitive topics on race and culture included in multicultural literature.

Keywords: Multicultural literature, intercultural theory, diversity, culture, intercultural pedagogy, L2 English, education, content analysis, interviews, upper-secondary school, Sweden

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1. Introduction

There has been an increasing need to discuss globalization and culture, particularly in the context of language education, in the past few decades. The advancement of the internet and social media has made the world smaller, and we are seeing the presence and influence of different ethnicities and nationalities becoming more prominent in Sweden. There has, in other words, never been a greater need for young adults to be able to understand themselves and their identity concerning others who do not share the same worldview. It is required that the future members of society learn to interact with others who do not share the same perception, culture, and identity as themselves; the teaching of English as a globalized language and language education more generally in this context plays a crucial part in young adults' encounters with different cultural contexts. Therefore, schools need to ensure that students have the tools necessary to be able to create a world where humanity and social justice can flourish.

Swartz (2020) advocates the point of using fiction and literary works to offer an alternative way of looking at the world as well as a means to deal with tough topics. Laminack and Kelly (2019, as cited in Swartz, 2020) state that books can function as bridges that expand the reader's comprehension of alternate views, new ideas, and options. Meeting characters of different settings and cultural identities creates an opportunity for the reader to understand the differences between themselves and others. Indeed, corresponding to this view, in the course curriculum for English in upper-secondary school, found in The Swedish National Agency, there is an emphasis on teaching societal, ethical, and existential issues as well as cultural, historical, political, and social conditions in parts of the world where English is being spoken (Skolverket, 2011, p. 5). The use of literature, which, though briefly, is mentioned in the curriculum, plays a significant part in students being introduced to different cultural, historical, political, and social contexts. However, since the titles of the books, and how they ought to be used, are not specified in the curriculum, teachers are left to their own preferences when it comes to choosing the literature. Thus, in this thesis I will examine how English teachers choose and make use of literary works to explore foreign cultural contexts and identities in their classrooms by drawing on intercultural theories in education.

Broadly speaking, intercultural theory (Quinn, 2021) focuses on the interactions between different cultural and national contexts and settings. In the context of second

language education and literature, it places emphasis on how learning a particular language entails encounters with not only new linguistic formations but also a new and foreign cultural context that comes with it (Quinn, 2021). Literary texts in this regard offer a rich resource where such intercultural interactions take place at the level of teaching and learning. The students' encounter with new cultural contexts and settings has the pedagogical potential not only to get acquainted with new and foreign worlds but it also enables the students to step out of their familiar and mainstream cultural contexts and thereby to view their own culture from an outside perspective. Such experiences in turn, as Quinn (2021) argues, can "reveal students' own underlying presumptions and prejudices" (p. 52).

Multicultural literature, that is literature reflecting and exploring cultural diversity, in this context, has proven to help students gain diverse perspectives of the world (Yokota, 2009). Multicultural literature, defined as literature about marginalized people and those regarded as being outside of mainstream society, can tell stories of cultural diversity by consisting of stories of people from different cultural, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds, as well as reflecting on issues such as gender and sexuality (Canales et al, 2002). Drawing on these ideas, in this study, I aim to examine how and whether the teachers' choices of literary texts for classroom use reflect a concern with issues of cultural diversity and difference through the lens of intercultural theory and multicultural literature in their English courses. This thesis seeks to highlight both the possibilities and challenges involved in implementing an intercultural approach in teaching literature, addressing both the benefits and problems that come with it.

1.1 Study area and research questions

Research on English teachers' thought processes behind their choice of literature for upper secondary schools in Sweden is well-established (Granath, 2017; Ståhlberg, 2011). However, exploring how literature is being used through the lens of intercultural theory and multicultural literature, which this thesis seeks to do, has not been part of scholarly debate. To this end, the current thesis focuses on the pedagogical practices and reflections of six English teachers based in upper secondary schools in Sweden, with an emphasis on the participating teachers' literature curricula and how the books are being used to approach and discuss diversity in classrooms. To achieve these goals, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the principles and reasonings behind the teachers' choices of multicultural literature for the curriculum?
2. What are the benefits of working interculturally with multicultural literature according to the participating teachers?
3. What types of challenges do the participating English teachers come across when dealing with multicultural literature in their English courses?

2. Background

2.1 Literature in the course curriculum

In order to further grasp the relevance of intercultural pedagogy in the teaching of literature within the context of Sweden, it is necessary to take a closer look at the pedagogical guidelines provided by the official Swedish curriculum. When it comes to the matter of literature and diversity in English 6 (English in the 11th grade), two points stand out: firstly, the importance of literature and more particularly fiction is strongly emphasized in the teaching of the subject, but what is actually supposed to be read is not stated. Secondly, the notion of diversity and intercultural interaction are only indirectly discussed, only between the lines, meaning that there are no clear guidelines or principles. The course curriculum in this context asserts that “Living conditions, attitudes, values, traditions, social issues as well as cultural, historical, political, and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” should be part of the teaching of English and literature (Skolverket, 2011, p. 7).

Several conclusions can be gathered from these two points. The course curriculum leaves much in the hands of the educators that teach the subject who ultimately are responsible to choose the literature and who decide what should be focused on. The educators are expected to carry the responsibility to be aware of current issues and to use these issues to discuss and process aspects of the students' lives. Issues as diverse as, for instance, war, mass-migrations, the Me-too movement, Black Lives Matter, Covid-19, etc., in this context all prove relevant to the students' lives, especially considering the role of social media by which the students engage with such phenomena. Intercultural approaches to the teaching of foreign languages including English and more specifically to the teaching of literature in this context

can provide productive perspectives and entry points for teachers and students to integrate such large societal, cultural and political issues on a global scale – issues that the Swedish curriculum seems to encourage to be part of the teaching of English.

2.2 Intercultural theory

Intercultural pedagogy is an area of research in education and teaching of languages that arose in tandem with societal changes and their effects in classrooms including increased globalization and migration as a means to make sense of such development. Sani (2014) explains intercultural pedagogy as a set of multifaced approaches in education that seek to encourage individuals to “not only accept their own culture” but also “engage in a process of constructive dialogue with other cultures” (p. 485). From a similar angle, Matos and Melo-Pfeifer (2020) also comments on this aspect of interculturalism and education and explain why teachers need to be aware of it. They explain that bridging borders between self and others start with removing our cultural assumptions which constitutes a key aspect of intercultural pedagogy which prove significant especially in our contemporary context of globalisation, growing technology, and refugee migration. Significantly, they propose that literature and fiction can play an important part in this process since it “renegotiates the borders between self and others”. This is also why they argue that literature should “assume a renewed purpose in language education” from an intercultural perspective (Matos & Melo-Pfeifer, 2020, p. 11).

A core value, regarding intercultural pedagogy, is rethinking what we think we already know about other cultures and beliefs. Literature in this context is seen as a gateway to achieving this form of rethinking since a literary text can transport readers to unfamiliar contexts and stories. Matos and Melo-Pfeifer (2020, p. 13) state that it is precisely this aspect of literature that enables learners to observe, reflect, and ask fundamental questions about different cultures and concepts. Working with such literary texts might make readers involved with new and foreign contents and contexts, so that the actual encounter with, say, diversity in real life, is not something to be feared or nervous about. If one of the main goals of schools is to foster future members of society, as is also the case within the Swedish context of second language (English) education, then the rise of globalisation and the increasing diversity of our classrooms demand that students are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate possible intercultural encounters with contexts and cultures different from their own.

An important point is that one should learn about one's own culture and not only the target culture (i.e., the foreign culture one encounters in an intercultural setting). According to Quinn (2021, p. 52), seeing one's own culture being digested by others can make the learner aware of the cultural norms or the stereotypes that are present in one's own cultural context, as well as how one's own culture is seen by others. Not being aware of one's own cultural stereotypes can cramp the communication between outsiders and the new learner. Quinn also adds that the extent of misconstruction and conflict is even greater when second language learners are involved. Second-language teachers need thus be particularly aware of how literary works, that engage with other cultures, have the potential to both reinforce and question stereotypes and prejudices.

Literature can, according to Quinn, create and maintain national stereotypes through imagology which generally deals with the construction of ethnic, national, racial, and cultural images (2021, p. 53). The construction of a national image has the ability to spread when employed in literature. The circulation of stereotypes about a culture can potentially hinder intercultural communication and interaction. It is thus important for educators to make informed choices and to be attentive and self-reflexive about the types of representation of cultures a text may produce or enhance. It is easy to understand then why second-language teachers should be aware of imagology since it relates to representations of nations and cultural identities in literature. Conflict and confusion can easily arise when students are presented with stereotypes, which pedagogically demand that the teacher is capable of guiding the discussion.

Viewed in this context, it is possible to claim that the content in multicultural literature, to put it simply, is literature that deals with diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and identities that fall outside the mainstream (Canales et al, 2002), can provide ways of dismantling and questioning stereotypes and prejudices. But such literature can also, precisely for this reason, lead to uncomfortable discussions between students, which is why the teacher's role in the classroom is critical. Glazer and Seo (2015) claim that teachers must cultivate an environment where cultural differences can be met and discussed through literature. It is thus required that teachers must build a curriculum that allows students to process and learn from each other's perspectives through literature. However, accompanying and informed pedagogical tools in teaching literary texts from this angle are also needed since the act of merely implementing multicultural literature does not automatically create respect or understanding for cultural differences, as stated by Glazer and

Seo (2015, p. 686). This idea is shared by Morrell and Morrell (2012) seeing how they find that the reception of a text that revolves around different racial and cultural contexts heavily relies on the teaching of that particular text. The dialogue between students must be overseen by the teacher in order to encourage discussion, especially when the discussion is about hot topics or issues that are generally hard to talk about (Glazer & Seo, 2015; Morrell & Morrell, 2012).

Since intercultural theory in pedagogy is precisely about negotiating, encountering, and learning about cultural differences, it offers a useful tool to approach literary texts, especially those categorized as multicultural. Being able to negotiate and discuss cultural identities, contexts, and environments, from analytical and interpretive perspectives, is optimal when dealing with multicultural literature. But what the students get to read is mostly up to the teachers. Selecting the appropriate literature to discuss thus makes up one of the challenging and significant aspects of teaching and it can be demanding, which is explored in the following sections.

2.3 Multicultural literature and its benefits

Multicultural literature, or culturally diverse literature, can be defined in many ways. Boyd et al. (2015, p. 379) discuss multicultural literature in terms of diversity and explain multicultural literature as a social construct and as fluid and complex. In the matter of literature, diversity is centered around themes of culture, ethnicity, gender, race, etc. Morrell and Morrell (2012) see multicultural literature as texts about characters from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds which can be narrowed down to two main ideas. The first idea is to confirm, and celebrate, diversity through authentic representations of groups that have been marginalized and show the marginalization from different perspectives. The second idea is to confront and dissolve stereotypes about those outside of mainstream society (2012, p. 11).

These ideas, namely the affirmation of diversity and the confrontation of stereotypes, correspond to Linder's (2021) point on using multicultural literature to develop social awareness in education. Without knowing the history and experiences behind different cultures including racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, young peoples' responses to the said topics can be limited. Linder, in this context, argues that the ability to emotionally connect with different cultures and people can be gained through multicultural literature (2021, p. 35). Like Linder, Iwai (2015) also sees the benefits of using multicultural literature

in educational contexts and states that “Opportunities are plentiful for fostering students’ diversity awareness in schools” (2015, p. 86).

The authors mentioned so far explain how multicultural literature can be used to learn about other cultures. However, multicultural literature is also used to make students reflect on their own culture. This idea is mentioned by Glazier and Seo (2005) in their description of multicultural literature, which they define as literature that represents voices outside of the traditional canon, as either a mirror to reflect on the readers’ own identities and cultures or as a window opening up to other, foreign contexts and cultures. Although Morrell and Morrell (2012) do not use the same terminology, they also encourage a multi-perspectival approach when dealing with multicultural literature. Students should use their knowledge, and what they have learned, from their own culture to learn from the experience of others in different cultures (p. 12). The choice of literature, whether it is used as a mirror or as a window, in this context as I will also reflect on further in the following section, is thus crucial for intercultural perspectives to be implemented in English language and literature educational settings.

However, as previously mentioned, the choice of literature that deal with different cultures alone is not enough to implement intercultural pedagogy in classes where English literature is being digested. The chosen literature should be complemented by tools that help students develop the ability to reflect on the reading critically and analytically as well. In this sense, multicultural literature can also be used to encourage critical thinking, which requires the students and teachers to reflect on the content analytically by questioning, for instance, the narrative perspective; whose voice are we hearing? Who has the powerful position of telling the story?

Teachers, who strive toward a world where social equality is desired, then can see multicultural literature as a means to enrich students’ lives and as a gateway to critical thinking. Peterson (cited in Swartz, 2020) highlights the effect of engaging with unfamiliar characters in contexts that are beyond the students’ frame of reference. Reading about how fictional characters deal with different events and relationships can make students learn from situations that would otherwise never have happened to them.

Being aware of “the danger of the single story” is also important regarding critical thinking in an intercultural context as explained by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie (Boyd, et al., 2009, p. 378). Having only read books from the western canon, she

explains the paradigm shift she experienced when encountering African characters in books written by African authors. Adichie concludes that learning only a single perspective about a particular culture or group of people creates assumptions and stereotypes. Multicultural literature that often introduces alternative and marginalized perspectives in this context can also be a useful tool to confront what Adichie calls “single” stories.

Given the importance of multicultural literature, and its applications in intercultural pedagogy, into consideration, it is vital to investigate if and how literature in English is taught in Swedish classrooms. In the Swedish context, since multicultural literature is not specifically mentioned in the curriculum for English, the implementation of literature, that deals with diversity, is up to the individual teacher. As previously mentioned, this particular field (teachers’ experience with intercultural pedagogy and multicultural literature in upper-secondary school in Sweden) is relatively unexplored and needs further exploration, which the current thesis seeks to do by focusing on the experiences and reflections of practicing/active teachers in dialogue with the theoretical angle of intercultural pedagogy.

2.4 Selecting multicultural literature

There are several factors one must consider when choosing multicultural literature for students to discuss in class. “Authenticity”, although a complex term in itself, in multicultural literature is seen as a prerequisite by several authors (Linder, 2021; Adam and Harper, 2016; Iwai, 2015). Linder explains that there are several ways that can help teachers verify the authenticity of a text. One can for instance examine if the author is a part of the cultural group that is present in the text. Looking at the cultural and historical accuracy is also a way to verify the “authenticity”, according to Linder (2021) and Iwai (2015). Not only does accurate representation give the students the chance to discuss culture in class but it also, according to Adam and Harper (2016), promotes a positive sense of identity and belonging.

Choosing literature that represents the racial/cultural backgrounds of the pupils is also recommended by Linder (2021) when it comes to making informed choices. Additionally, choosing multicultural literature that challenges conventional depictions of diverse groups is also encouraged. Essentially, having the opportunity to discuss cultural identities, contexts, and environments through a wide array of genres is beneficial since diversity in literature can be met through different literary and aesthetic forms. Adam and Harper (2016) write that discussing stereotypes, found in multicultural literature, together in class can foster skills such as “critical and creative thinking, personal and social capabilities,

and ethical and intercultural understandings” (p. 1). This sentiment is also shared by Boyd et.al (2015, p. 379) as they encourage teachers to not avoid differences of opinion when discussing literature in the classroom. They recognize the difficulty in doing so but at the same time highlight the positive outcome. Discussing opinions and stereotypes is only possible if the students are given the opportunity. Boyd, et al., much like the steering documents for the subject English in Sweden, place the responsibility, regarding selecting literature for the students, on the teachers. They claim that “the implementation of culturally diverse literature in the classroom only occurs when teachers are willing to make change happen” (Boyd, et al., 2015, p 380).

However, it is not only the choices but also the question of how the teachers are expected to use the chosen, multicultural forms of literature from an intercultural theoretical perspective in this sense makes up a crucial aspect of the scholarly discussion, which I take up in the following section.

2.5 Problems with the use of multicultural literature

While there are many benefits to using multicultural literature in class, several authors also highlight problems that can potentially arise. As far as depicting accurate and factual documentation of a diverse society goes, only a handful of novels manage to do that according to Lazar (1993, p. 16). Adam and Harpers (2016) hold similar thoughts on the matter: if teachers do not recognize what authentic and culturally diverse literature is in the first place, there is a chance that the chosen literature can hamper intercultural awareness, rather than stimulate it. They also point to research that reveals that many books about non-dominant cultures are written by authors from dominant cultures. These books can potentially have a harmful effect since the portrayal of the non-dominant culture would lack authenticity, which could lead to the author resorting to stereotypes or untruthful depictions.

Another problem area is the hesitation, or downright refusal, to discuss cultural aspects that are seen as hot topics through multicultural literature. Glazer and Seo argue that topics that can produce silence among students include social class, race, culture, religion, and politics. The reason for such silence according to Morell and Morell (2012, p. 11) in their case study on the novel *Huckleberry Finn* show, might be due to the fact that the students did not know how to express their own experiences or perspectives. There are also scholars who argue that multicultural literature education is not that effective in promoting social harmony. According to Goo (2018), multicultural literature education sees literature as a way to

advance an ideology, rather than a work of art that should be appreciated (p. 324). Further criticism is expressed towards the fact that teachers, who choose what to teach, can “force” their own personal opinions and ideologies on learners.

Despite such criticisms, however, the active use of intercultural perspectives in tandem with multicultural literature, as this thesis will show —and as several scholars discussed in the following section argue— still provides a productive angle for the teaching of literature, especially in second language education.

2.6 Previous research on teachers’ experiences with multicultural literature

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate English teachers’ thoughts and opinions on the inclusion of multicultural literature in upper secondary schools. Stallworth et al. conducted a study in 2006 where one of the research questions explored English teachers’ reasons for incorporating, or excluding, multicultural literature in their curriculum. The issue of censorship was one of these challenges. Sticking to “the classics” was a safer choice since diverse literature often includes sensitive subject matters (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, etc). Stallworth et al. (2006, p. 484) also report that many teachers feared repercussions from parents, colleagues, or the community if they were to include non-canonical works addressing such sensitive issues. Other challenges included the lack of knowledge and expertise. English teachers are traditionally well-rehearsed in English and American culture and history; however, teachers cannot teach what they do not know and this aspect of the challenges of teaching multicultural literature was particularly underlined in their research.

Similar conclusions were found in Baker’s (1997) study where he sought to understand how English teachers in secondary schools incorporated multicultural literature in their classes, and the challenges faced in this process. Baker questioned why teachers, who appreciated the importance of multicultural literature, did not include more of it in their classes. Some of the reasons included political concerns, issues of censorship and divisiveness, and lack of resources. One point that stands out is that many of the teachers only included multicultural literature when their classrooms became more diverse. Baker sees this kind of implementation of multicultural literature as an “additive” to the curriculum, which makes it easier to dismiss when the teachers get overwhelmed by other curricular demands (1997, p. 145).

Lenarz's (2002) dissertation examines high school English teachers' use of multicultural literature in their curricula that add to the discussion launched by scholars like Baker and Stallworth et al. Unlike the latter two, however, the dissertation's findings point to more positive experiences: the findings make it evident that teachers had positive experiences with the use of the said literature. The teachers used multicultural literature to raise students' cultural awareness, deal with sensitive subjects, expose them to other world cultures and perspectives and also make the students relate the stories to their own lives (p. 72).

From a different angle, Svensson's work (2015) seeks to understand how English teachers use particularly "postcolonial literature" (literature that responds to or engages with the experiences of colonialism and its aftermath) to teach intercultural competence and specifically in the context of Sweden. The findings highlight that three out of five teachers included postcolonial literature in their curriculums in order to introduce the students to other cultures in countries, other than the US and Britain, where English is spoken. The teachers' lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity with the postcolonial literature, are some of the reasons why some of the teachers did not include it in their curriculum. Despite these difficulties, however, all five teachers saw value in integrating culture in their readings so that the students have the opportunity to discuss cultural diversity, among other aspects of interculturalism, in the English classroom. The findings show that an investigation of teaching multicultural forms of literature through intercultural perspectives requires attention to both the challenges and the possibilities such a practice involves in our teaching of English, a perspective that this thesis takes up in its investigation and handling of empirical data as explained below.

3. Method

In this study, I chose qualitative interviews as my data collection method to collect data from six English teachers. Brickmann and Kvale (2018) describe interviews as a conversation with a purpose that has been structured by the interviewer. It is explained as a strong and valuable tool for research since it means to explore how the interviewees experience and understand their world. Interviews allow subjects to give their thoughts, opinions, and real-life descriptions of a particular subject or field (p. 10). The same explanation is given by Patel and Davidsons (2011) who also add that interviews are optimal when the study is based on a small group of informants, as it is in this case. Taking this into consideration, qualitative interviews were chosen due to the nature of my study, which was to count for six teachers' thoughts and

experiences regarding the use of multicultural literature in English 6. It is from this methodological angle that the interviews for this study have been conducted.

3.1 The interviews

The interviews were held over a 2-week period due to limited availability among the participants. Whenever the interview was held in person, they were conducted at the workplace of that particular teacher. Two of the interviews were conducted via a video conferencing tool. The interviews were recorded with a recording device, which had been approved by the participants. The recordings made it possible to remember spontaneous follow-up questions, which greatly helped during the transcription process. Given that Swedish was the first language of all the teachers, the interviews were conducted in Swedish to reduce the chance of teachers not understanding the questions. In order to make the teachers' accounts more accessible, their answers were translated and adjusted where it was found necessary.

To keep the interviews natural and open, the interviews were semi-structured. Brickmann and Kvale (2018) state that semi-structured interviews follow a sequence of themes, but at the same time include an openness that allows the interview to change direction based on the stories told by the subjects. The interviews were held on the basis of a list of pre-determined questions (see appendix 2) but still allowed for a conversation where the participants had the chance to share their thoughts and ideas on the subject at hand or on any new areas they brought up.

3.1.1 Sampling procedures

The selection was made by sending out a document that contained the details of the investigation (see appendix 2), along with additional information, to teachers in nearby schools. Since my study attempts to reveal how a total of six English teachers view, and use, multicultural literature, I considered it appropriate that the selection would be based on two criteria. The first criterion was that all participants taught the same course, namely English 6, so that they follow the same requirements from the official Swedish curriculum for the English subject. The second criterion was that the teachers have had some experience of using multicultural literature before in their classroom to be able to reflect and elaborate on their practice.

3.1.2 Participants and the teaching material

Based on the aforementioned criteria, the current study draws on data collected from six volunteering participants, though 14 were contacted. The current study thus had an approximately 50 % response rate. The total recording time across all participants amounted to 4 hours and 8 minutes. The difference in recording time was due to expanded explanations and examples. When accumulated, the average recording time was around 41 minutes. Table 1 provides information about the participants.

Table 1. Participants in the study.

Participants	Teaching experience	Recording time	Recently used book/short story	Description of used literature
Teacher 1 (T1)	1 Year	37:09	<i>My Son the Fanatic</i>	A short story about the conflict between a father and a son that revolves around assimilation and identity.
Teacher 2 (T2)	10 Years	54:18	<i>The Giver</i>	A young adult dystopian novel that tells the tale of a society that has achieved “sameness”, which has surpassed any cultural differences.
Teacher 3 (T3)	11 Years	40:35	<i>A Very Large Expanse of Sea</i>	A young adult novel that revolves around a young Muslim girl and how she deals with stereotypes about her.
Teacher 4 (T4)	2 Years	39:43	<i>Sherlock Holmes</i>	A detective novel about Sherlock Holmes, a cunning detective that uses his wits to overcome challenges.

Teacher 5 (T5)	4 Years	41:10	<i>No.1 Ladies Detective Agency</i>	A novel featuring an African woman working as the first female detective in Africa.
Teacher 6 (T6)	5 Years	35:29	<i>Does My Head Look Big in This?</i>	A novel about a young Muslim girl's decision to start wearing the hijab at the age of sixteen.

Table 1 illustrates the literature the teachers have recently used. A brief description of the used literature is also included in the table so that it does not take up space in the result and discussion section. Such description, though short, is necessary to provide some context when the titles are mentioned in the results and discussion section. A pattern that we can notice is the different genres included in the list of books used by the teachers. This matter will be further discussed in 4.1.2. As can be seen, the fact that the teachers were from different schools, and that their experiences also varied, contributes to variation among the participants. It should be noted however that the titles presented in table 1 are not the only titles the teachers have been working with; they are merely the most recent titles the teachers have used to discuss intercultural encounters most of which were mentioned and elaborated on during the interviews.

3.1.3 Ethical aspects

The ethical aspects were managed in accordance with the Swedish Research Council's (Vetenskapsrådet, 2021) and Patel and Davidson's (2011) ethical guidelines. To ensure the participants' willingness to participate in the interviews, the ethical aspects were explained before the interviews took place. The purpose of the study and how their participation would contribute to it were clarified for the participants. It was made clear that they would be completely anonymous and that their contribution could never be linked to them. They were also informed that they could choose to end their participation at any time. The information was clarified in person as well as in the letter of consent they signed before the interviews were conducted. This was done to ensure that the requirements regarding information and consent were followed (Vetenskapsrådet, 2021). During the interviews themselves, Patel and Davidson's (2011) advice was followed to ensure that the participants felt comfortable expressing their thoughts without inhibitions.

3.2 Data analysis and procedure

Qualitative content analysis, which was used in this study to analyse the data from the interviews, aims to interpret and understand specific statements mentioned by the participant (Brickmann & Kvale, 2018, p 122). The current study employs an inductive approach to the analysis of data. Brickmann and Kvale (2018) state that an inductive approach is used to “identify patterns and formulate potential explanations of the patterns” (p. 118). Content analysis is based on codes, which are one or more keywords attached to specific statements (p. 121). The coding process was done bottom-up since the codes were developed during the initial stages of the analysis. The field notes, which refer to specific time-marked statements, collected during the interviews were used in tandem with the recordings in order to identify codes. Notes were taken in parts where the teachers spoke on points relevant to the study’s research questions, as to aid the coding process. The codes were then categorized by converting longer accounts from the interviews, which again were relevant to the study’s research questions, into simpler categories (Brickmann & Kvale, 2018). One major benefit of categorization is the overview of the transcripts one gains. With this overview, the categories could then be processed individually where reoccurrences in thoughts and opinions among the participants were examined and compared. The identified categories generated from the analysis include: *the selection process, point of view and growth, dealing with stereotypes, and how it can be used and problems with using multicultural literature.*

4. Results and discussion

The findings of the interviews are presented in this section, with subsections for each category and additional subsections for discussion.

4.1 The selection process

4.1.1 Results

The key aspect discussed, by the teachers in the interviews, with regard to the selection process, was that the literature the teachers chose had to be representative of the different cultural backgrounds and issues found in society. T1 recently used the short story “My Son the Fanatic”, by Hanif Kureishi for instance since immigration and assimilation were a hot topic at the time and continue to be. T2, who has a very diverse class, chose an interesting

approach. She uses Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, which is a novel that explores a utopian society that has reached the ultimate "sameness" to discuss how mundane and meaningless a society can be without diversity.

T2: I use *The Giver* to discuss how the lack of diversity and culture can be a problem and very boring- So, we talk about the otherness while discussing sameness.

T3 and T6 both stated that they currently have a lot of girls that wear hijabs in their English 6 classes, which made them use books that presented that particular culture. T4 and T5 shared similar responses and argued that much is dependent on *how* the book is being used in class and not only on the content. T4 recently used *Sherlock Holmes*, which is not necessarily a book that addresses diversity, but the teacher used the book in creative ways to discuss gender and sexual orientation as part of the topics of diversity since he has at least five or six different genders in his class.

T4: For example, we discussed how coloured people were portrayed in great length and the lingering homosexuality between Holmes and Watson. But we also asked and answered questions such as "how would it affect the story if Sherlock Holmes was a woman or a transgender"?

T5 spoke on common feelings and concluded (much like T4) that a book can be used to stimulate empathy for very different social groups without even directly addressing those groups; it all depends on how one uses the book. It is a matter of recognizing the struggles of others and finding ways of relating to them and then making the students see themselves in the said struggle.

T5: If a book is dealing with the idea of not fitting in, it doesn't matter if it's a book about a black teen in a white society. Everyone who shares the feeling of not fitting in will be able to recognize themselves in that story.

Another essential point was that the multicultural literature ought to have been written by authentic authors and that their depictions of a certain culture are accurate. All of the teachers admitted that they try to deviate from authors from the traditional western canon as much as possible, but several of the teachers do not see the use of literary canons as a problem. T1 stated that if a book portrays the life of a particular culture, it is important for her that the author is from that culture so that it is representative. T2, T3, and T6 gave similar responses where they also shared that it was important for them that the authors have a particular tie to the culture they depict. T3 has recently used the book *A Very Large Expanse of Sea*, written

by Tahereh Mafi. Since the book is about an Islamic female teenager's experience in the US after the 9/11 attack, she claimed that it was important that the author has direct experience in the culture.

T3: If the book was written by a white American male, you would have gotten a totally different story. But having an author that has been through what the main character is dealing with creates authenticity in the narrative.

In contrast to this, T4 and T5 did not mind if the authors chosen did not have ties with the culture as long as the content is representative. When asked how much they think about the author of the books they use, they responded:

T4: It doesn't matter where the author is from, as long as the story is somewhat representative. I always make sure that the students understand that this is just one story of a particular author and that you have to separate the author from the main character.

T5: I think about it a lot but is not that important, really. If the content is accurate, it doesn't really matter who the author is. The book I use is written by Alexander McCall Smith, a white man.

For example, T5 highlighted the fact that a novel he frequently uses, namely *No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency*, is written by a white man. It tells the story of the first female African detective and is widely appreciated for its representation of the country Botswana and its people. All of the teachers did however see opportunities in using books written by authors who are not from the culture they write about. They claimed that it gave them a chance to discuss stereotypes and agendas and that it often occurs when dealing with older literature, especially when discussing the history of literature. Some examples mentioned by the teachers include for instance the depiction of tribalism in Africa and national stereotypes found in *The Heart of Darkness*, written by Joseph Conrad, the African stereotypes found in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and the racist language found in Mark Twain's novel *Huckleberry Finn* despite the book's anti-slavery sentiments.

4.1.2 Discussion

As the data indicates, the teachers see value in basing the curriculum around the different backgrounds of their students, which corresponds to Linder's point about making informed choices (2021). By including literature that represents voices outside of the traditional canon, the teachers enable the students to learn about other cultures and compare them to their own.

Several scholars (Glazier & Seo, 2005; Morrell & Morell, 2012; Iwai, 2015), see this as one of the treasures multicultural literature holds. Additionally, several teachers admit that they try to deviate from the traditional western canon as much as possible by incorporating authors from other cultural backgrounds while others state that it is the pedagogical approach one undertakes towards a book that matters more than its content. Many of the literature presented by the teachers in this study fit Salas et al's (2002) definition of the term multicultural literature since the literature essentially explores marginalized people and those outside of mainstream society.

The data shows that the teachers' opinions on the topic of "authenticity" differed substantially. While several of the teachers demanded that the authors have an original cultural tie with the culture they depict, others did not see this as a prerequisite. The greatest discrepancy in opinion can be seen in T4 and T5's responses since they both take into account in whether or not the content, for instance, literary depiction of a culture or a group, could be seen as representative of that culture or group. Being a part of the cultural group that is presented is one way of securing the authenticity of a text, according to Linder (2021). However, Iwai (2015) asserts that the books should also include an authentic description of the culture in question, which the identity of the author does not always guarantee, points that both T4 and T5 take up. All teachers valued accurate representation since it gives the students a chance to meet diverse and complex characters and stories of a culture. With the exception of T2 and T4, the literature the teachers recently have used in class aligns with what Sani (2014) sees as intercultural, namely engaging in a constructive dialogue with other cultures. However, T2 and T4 do not see reading books that depict mainstream or dominant cultural elements and settings as a problem since they found ways to raise diverse topics and work interculturally.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that the teachers' choices in literature included different genres. The choices in literature presented by the teachers can be tied to Linder's (2021) statement on how the use of different genres makes it possible to meet and discuss different forms of diversity in literature. Not only do we have a classic detective story, such as *Sherlock Holmes*, but we also have a more contemporary, and multicultural, also belonging to the detective novel genre, namely *No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency*. Additionally, we can see two coming-of-age stories told from multicultural perspectives in the teachers' lists. The teachers also reported that they frequently use short stories to regularly expose the students to different

settings and situations. The different genres make it possible to discuss cultural identities in different forms and contexts which Linder (2021) sees as beneficial.

4.2 Point of view and growth

4.2.1 Results

One of the significant aspects of using multicultural literature in the classroom is to expose the students to the unfamiliar and the foreign. By learning about other cultures and their social, political, and literary contexts from a different point of view, the students gain new perspectives and growth in mindset which is reflected in the results of this study.

The results consistently showed that introducing students to the unfamiliar bore significant value, if not the main reason for choosing multicultural literature. Three points were identified and consist of exploring the unfamiliar, creating empathy, and growth in mindset. T1 pointed out that she wants her students to learn that different cultures from different backgrounds have their own prejudices and stereotypes. She has the goal of making the majority of the class feel how it is like to be viewed from a prejudiced perspective.

T1: My student found it very unfamiliar to see the prejudices against white culture in *My Son the Fanatic*, but they also found it interesting.

T2 explained that it is important that the students get to experience things that are different from their mainstream cultural contexts by stepping out of their familiar frame of reference. She also stated that multicultural literature is often not that “popular” among students, which makes it an attractive source for the teacher to introduce something unfamiliar to the students.

Another significant point that was mentioned by all, but most elaborated by T3 and T6, focused on the use of point of view and perspective. They saw value in using stories told from the perspective of a very unfamiliar main character. They explained that their choices in literature gave a voice to their students who wore hijabs in their classes for instance. This was done by choosing books that presented the perspective of young Muslim girls.

T3: The book (*A Very Large Expanse of Sea*) is basically about how the main character deals with stereotypes made of her. So, the students get to “confront” the stereotypes through the main character, rather than on their own.

T6: *Does My Head Look Big in This?* makes the student take part of something that is very central to many young Muslim girls in our western culture. It forces the reader to

understand how divisive a choice like that can be and takes them along for the experience.

T5 believed in exposing the students to see the familiar in an unfamiliar setting to create a reciprocal relationship between the student and the new context they are introduced to through literature. T5 used *No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency* since it is a recognizable genre for the students since they were already familiar with the usual detective story. He stated that “it was really interesting since they saw familiar things in another culture”, in this case, the African culture in Botswana, and felt that it made it easier for the students to ask questions since they were already familiar with what a detective does.

Subsequently, the use of multicultural literature to create empathy was achieved by making the students relate to the characters, the content, or the form (as in the detective novel) in the assigned literature. The goal of creating empathy and connection was to inspire growth and understanding, of other cultures, that would benefit the students in the future. When asked how they used multicultural literature to develop social and cultural awareness, T1 and T2 emphasized how reading about other people’s hardships can widen the students’ own perspective in life. T1 and T2 did not shy away from making the students uncomfortable; it can even be argued that making them feel uncomfortable was their intention in the first place.

T1: A lot of things will make them feel uncomfortable if they have lived a sheltered life. The literature I use makes them see things from a different perspective.

T2: Multicultural literature has a way of forcing the students to see how it is “on the other side”, as it were. I mean, reading should make you feel uncomfortable. That’s how you grow.

T3’s response was similar to that of T2 but was expanded upon to show that the students have to use what they have learned in order to integrate and digest what they have learned in their encounter with the unfamiliar. The student might feel empathy when they meet characters who experience hardship, or characters that they are not familiar with, but they need to also ventilate these feelings.

T3: We live in a mixed society, with a lot of different nationalities. Reading a book about another culture is good since it creates an understanding. But discussing the content with members of said culture expands this understanding and makes it factual for them.

Another significant aspect of working with multicultural literature is that it contributes to cultivating future members of society. T4, T5, and T6 directly mention that if the students do not learn how to understand a different culture and mindset, they are not only harming themselves, but they are also “polluting” the society with a “my way is the right way” mentality.

T4: If students do not know how to process empathy, they will naturally resort to prejudices. These prejudices then blend into society, which is impossible to get rid of.

T5: It is always ideal to have the students read about how other cultures react to their own culture. That is how it is in our society.

T6: If these students understand why characters from a certain culture think the way they think or act the way they act, they will automatically understand the same people in our actual society.

The aforementioned excerpts highlight how T3, T4, T5 and T6 value the role multicultural literature has in upper secondary school by mentioning how it directly influences our society as a result of the study. While T1 and T2 did not directly mention society, it can be argued that their reasons for understanding what is unfamiliar and foreign is to make the student able to navigate their life after graduation which relates to the larger social impact of such literary teaching.

4.2.2 Discussion

The three topics that were identified in the results, namely exploring the unfamiliar, creating empathy, and growth in mindset, can all be tied to intercultural pedagogy. The teachers included multicultural literature with the goal of making the students confront the unfamiliar in order to challenge their cultural assumptions. Matos and Melo-Pfeifer (2020) comment on precisely this aspect as one of the most crucial factors and benefits of intercultural theory as it is applied in education. Society was frequently mentioned when the teachers discussed how they used multicultural literature to develop social and cultural awareness. Much like Matos and Melo-Pfeifer, the teachers reasoned that it is important that the students get to encounter unfamiliar cultures through literature so that the unfamiliar becomes familiar in real-life situations. It is fitting, then, that many of the books mentioned by the teachers include stories about how a non-western character interacts with the western culture. Reading about such fictional encounters means that the students are learning about two cultures simultaneously since they are essentially dealing with cultural clashes as well as dialogue between different

contexts and settings. This correlates well with Quinn's (2021) point on how one should not only learn about the target culture but also one's own culture. This method of working with two cultures simultaneously corresponds to Morell and Morell's (2012) suggestion for a multi-perspectival approach where they argue that the students should use what they know from their own cultures to learn about other cultures. It can also be tied to Glazier and Seo's (2005) statement on seeing multicultural literature as a mirror or a window. The students get to learn about how their own cultures are viewed by others (opening a new window or perspective) whilst learning about the other culture in a self-reflexive way (hence the mirror).

The results also show that empathy is created often in discussions between the students when they get to share their experiences in class. Discussing topics and themes such as "assimilation and identity", "a culturally homogeneous society" or "wearing a hijab as being oppressed," may help the students learn from each other. For example, T3 and T6 gave voices to the hijab-wearing girls in their classroom, which goes a long way in promoting a positive sense of identity and belonging, according to Adam and Harper (2016). It is this interaction, achieved through discussion and literary analysis of themes, that has the potential to expand the students' viewpoints, according to Quinn (2021). The books that challenge the students with these types of subjects also help the students develop globally oriented perspectives on different social issues, which Yokota (2009) sees as one of the benefits of multicultural literature.

Using multicultural literature to inspire growth in mindset was in this sense a common denominator among the teachers. The multicultural literature exposed the students to the difficulties ethnic characters experience on a daily basis for instance, which consequently created empathy in the students. Empathy is in turn seen as a source for further growth in mindset when the experience of empathy through literature is then shared and discussed with others, which is why the teachers' sought to create environments where the stereotypes could be confronted and dissolved through discussion.

The teachers reasoning for the importance of learning from discussion of stereotypes can further be linked to Swartz's (2020) position on how books can be used to offer an alternative way of dealing with sensitive subjects and viewing the world in general. It can also be tied to Laminack and Kelly's (2019, as cited in Swartz, 2020) points on the benefits that can be gained from meeting, and understanding, characters from other cultural identities. The possibilities of gaining new perspectives, that is, growth in students' mindsets, and understanding of others in a different light, are possible if the empathy the students obtain can

make them identify with the books they read. This, according to Swartz, ultimately makes them see themselves as global citizens with the ability to imagine themselves in diverse situations and as having different cultural and social positions than they are familiar with in the first place. The teachers' viewpoints, as well as Swartz's statement, correlate with Matos and Melo-Pfeifer's (2020) argument on how crossing cultural and national borders, negotiating cultural differences, and learning to discuss these differences, ultimately gives a sense of mutuality. In conclusion, the evidence produced from the interview shows that the teachers included multicultural literature to make the students rethink what they thought they knew about a particular culture, which Matos and Melo-Pfeifer also see as a core value within intercultural pedagogy.

4.3 Dealing with stereotypes – and how they can be used

4.3.1 Results

One of the significant aims of using multicultural literature in the classroom is to learn how to deal with stereotypes found in literature as well as in life. The prior section demonstrated how the teachers used multicultural literature to introduce the students to the unfamiliar in hope that they would eventually learn to grow from the experience of such encounters. While dealing with stereotypes was explained as a troublesome ordeal, all of the teachers saw benefits in talking about them. Having read the assigned literature before implementing them in their classes, so as to anticipate the stereotypes included in the literature, was seen as a prerequisite. Consequently, they were also all in agreement on the matter of making the students see and understand the world surrounding them from an alternative angle. T3s response sets the foundation for how stereotypes are seen as truths and how to deal with them.

T3: In my days, stereotypes were just stereotypes. Everyone knew that it did not represent the truth. But today, stereotypes are seen as absolute truths. It is hard to get the students to think about WHY it is seen as a truth since you have to think critically.

While the rest of the teachers did not explicitly mention the term critical thinking, they did address using stereotypes to get the students to think about unfamiliar cultural practices and identities from different angles before they make a judgement about them. T1 and T4 mentioned how stereotypes can be “deconstructed” if the students can put themselves in the minds of the authors.

T1: We are talking about people who are still very young and impressionable. So, it is important to make them understand the authors' intentions and why they portray the stereotype in that particular way.

T4: Dealing with stereotypes regarding race is easy if you discuss why the authors included them. Then explain why we do not see stereotypes that way anymore. They have to compare their own way of seeing things with the authors.

T6 gave a similar response but highlighted the period, or culture, in which the novel they use, *Robinson Crusoe*, was written. Trying to make the students step outside of their own frame of reference and see the stereotyping of a black character in its own historical and cultural context was difficult, according to T6.

T6: It was a challenge to teach the students that *Robinson Crusoe* was not seen as racist when it was released in its literary period. But it was a necessary challenge since it forced them to think about the context, rather than just from their own opinions.

T2 and T5 addressed involving the students when discussing stereotypes. They felt that a stereotype should be dealt with in dialogues between the students, rather than through a didactic monologue from the teacher. T2 makes the students try to formulate how they see the stereotype before they discuss it in class, in order to compare how their thoughts on the matter have changed after the discussion. T5 does not shy away from discussing stereotypes and tries to make students who are affected by the depiction of a certain culture have the first say. He concluded by stating that stereotypes can only be resolved when the students are able to think outside the box.

T2: I always try to make them compare how they first saw a culture and how they see it after the discussion. There usually is a big difference, since it is hard not to empathize with struggling characters, regardless of culture.

T5: If the stereotype is about a nationality that a student is from, I let them have the first say if they want. It is always best that the directly influenced students can share how they see it before others enforced the stereotype due to a lack of knowledge.

In summary, it can be seen from the excerpts that the teachers did not take stereotypes lightly. They found that it was important to meet stereotypes head-on and to discuss them thoroughly. It can be concluded from their responses that the goal of discussing them is to make the student able to think critically.

4.3.2 Discussion

The results indicate that discussing stereotypes was one of the reasons for incorporating multicultural literature. Having these discussions with the students was seen as difficult but highly necessary. When the students are exposed to stereotypes, they are confronted with their own underlying assumptions and prejudices (Quinn, 2021). The attempt to dissolve these prejudices was achieved by making the students think critically about the content. Viewing the characters from different angles by paying attention to points of view and perspectives in the literary text was a common strategy and could be tied to Adichie's concept of "the danger of a single story" (Boyd, 2009). This is because learning only about commonly accepted or dominant ideas about a culture might create assumptions and stereotypes, while the inclusion of different perspectives challenges them.

The teachers' emphasis on the necessity of discussion in this context correlates well with Adam and Harpers (2016) point on how a mutual discussion can foster several skills that enhance our intercultural understanding. The teachers' methods also highlight that they did in fact have an appropriate pedagogical attitude geared toward an intercultural perspective: this is detectable in their conscious goals: seeking to introduce the students to the unfamiliar, confronting stereotypes, and expanding the students' way of thinking about unfamiliar cultural contexts in general (growth in their mindset). As mentioned by Glazer and Seo (2015), such conscious strategies are required in order to implement intercultural pedagogy in a classroom environment of respect and mutual understanding of cultural differences. By discussing the author's intentions, the literary period the work was written in, comparing pre- and post-attitudes towards the culture, or having students from the depicted culture have the first say, it is evident that the teachers in this study encourage discussion on difficult matters, which is an approach Morrell and Morrell advocate (2012).

4.4 Problems with using multicultural literature

4.4.1 Results

The results from this study highlight the extensive list of difficulties experienced by the teachers in tandem with the use of multicultural literature, three of which will be presented here. The areas of difficulty include not being an expert, incidents and consequences, and lastly the matter of silence among the students (unwillingness to engage). While the teachers seemed to genuinely enjoy discussing multicultural literature with the students, they were

nevertheless adamant in explaining different contexts and situations where they struggled with specific matters.

The central issue of not being an expert in the specific culture they are expected to discuss through literature and fiction resulted in the fact that it limited the literary options for the teachers to choose from. The teachers reported that they cannot possibly know everything in all cultures and that it would take a lot of time to do the research. This brought on a fear that they might unknowingly include, and enforce, a negative stereotype. T2, T5, and T6 simply put that would have made their curriculum more diverse if they knew more about literature from other cultures.

T2: I do not know anything about Iranian culture. If I did, I would have included literature from that culture, since we have a lot of students from Iran in our school.

T6: I cannot know what is true or not in Afghan culture, for example. The author might have an agenda I am not familiar with.

T5: After BLM, I decided to include more black literature in my courses. I have done a lot of research and I am happy with the results. But I cannot possibly put the same effort into all the different cultures out there.

T4 addressed the time it takes to carefully approach sensitive topics, such as those related to race, ethnicity, and gender, meaning that the students need time to process the content whenever they are challenged.

T4: I am a cis man, so I cannot know what a good transsexual novel should be about. I want to include novels on transsexualism, but it takes so much time to break it down. You can't just throw these sensitive topics on the students like a hot potato.

We can see the outcome of not being an expert by observing several incidents that occurred while using multicultural literature which was shared by the teachers. Although they did not admit to it, it became apparent that these incidents, and the ramifications that followed, shaped the teachers' way of viewing how to approach sensitive matters in literature where they have to work across cultures. Since T1 has not been teaching for a long period of time, she did not mention any incident and will not be mentioned in this context. T2 mentioned an incident where a student, by mistake, used the derogatory term for black people in an out loud class reading. The whole incident, which gathered a lot of negative attention, made T2 exclude books that included such terms. She did, however, still discuss diversity and stereotyping but in a more indirect way so as to avoid conflict.

T2: After the incident, the students demanded that all the books that the word is in should be marked off. That's why I use *The Giver*, to show them that we need to discuss the importance of culture. It made it easier since we avoided conflict.

Subsequently, T3 and T4 also mentioned incidents that made them think twice before introducing culturally sensitive subjects. T3 explained how she got criticised by parents because of her use of a book including a transexual character. T4's case was not that severe, but he still mentioned that the incident, which occurred during the teaching of literary texts on war, made him consider how the students' past experiences can affect their reading. Following the war in Afghanistan, he used some short stories on the topic in class where several students had their PTSD triggered.

T3: The whole incident made me avoid certain subjects. It made that year horrible for me.

T4: It is a double-edged sword, since it can be very good for the students, but also trigger PTSD for those affected.

T6 shared a similar experience, but the complaints were not made by the students who were directly "mentioned" in the reading material. T6 was met by angry students, and some parents, when reading *Does My Head Look Big in This?*. The complaint was that they should not read books that endorse "forced hijab". T6 found this reaction rather peculiar since none of the hijab-wearing students participated in these criticisms; they even appreciated that hijabs were represented in literature and were a topic of discussion from a different angle that the majority was not familiar with.

T6: it was a very odd situation, since the students, who were white and Swedish, did not even try to understand the message in the book. They eventually did, which made them grow in mindset.

T5 did not elaborate more than stating that the BLM movement seriously affected his students and his school and that he wanted to represent them by making people understand black culture through literature.

Finally, the topic of silence among the students when discussing sensitive, or controversial, subjects presented in multicultural literature was brought up as one of the main challenges while teaching multicultural literature from an what we may consider an interculturally oriented pedagogical perspective. None of the teachers believed in censorship, yet they also stated that making the students discuss matters that might offend other students was hard to

deal with. Here, the teachers seemed to believe that it has all to do with the teacher's skill as a leader. According to T1, students become silent when they do not feel that they are in a safe environment. She explains that she has had students that tell her that they do not want to step on one's toes.

T1: I try to explain to them that we discuss things in class so that we can understand why it feels like you are stepping on toes. It is about creating an understanding.

On a similar note, T2 also feels that the content needs to be discussed so they understand why it is how it is. She does not like cases where students talk about the subject after class, instead of during the class.

T2: It doesn't work like that. That is not what I want literature to be about. They have to try at least so that it does not become a habit.

T3 and T6 shared similar responses. When dealing with stereotypes or other culturally sensitive topics, both mentioned how students tend to remain silent when they are alone in front of the entire class, but not in smaller groups. T3 and T6, much like T1, also thought that a lot of the student responses including silence depend on the student-teacher relationship.

T3: It is natural that students get quiet when dealing with sensitive topics. I have found that students are more likely to discuss sensitive topics when they are in groups.

T6: Students do not like to talk about sensitive topics out loud, but they do not seem to mind as much in smaller groups. That is why I let them group up and form questions about the content so that they can ask in a group, rather than by themselves.

The results show shared views among the teachers' answers; however, some teachers felt more strongly on this matter regarding silence than others. T4 and T5 elaborated on their answers since they saw silence in the classroom as very damaging. T4 concluded that they fail the students, as educators, if the students do not dare to ask questions in class.

T4: I think young people want to discuss sensitive topics on race and gender. But they hesitate because they think that a question is an answer or something that represents their mindset.

The matter of the students' fear of being wrongly interpreted was further discussed by T6. She mentioned how she can "feel" when students have prejudices that nevertheless cannot get resolved if they are kept silent. When two boys expressed that they did not believe that girls wore hijabs of their free will while discussing the book *Does My Head Look Big in This?*,

they were met with angry reactions which made them hesitant to voice their opinions again. T6 saw this as problematic since they did not intend on insulting anyone. Also, it was pointed out that those who were angriest did not even wear hijabs.

T6: I mean, yes, it was a prejudiced thought, but they asked questions to understand better. They got really embarrassed after the whole ordeal and it took time to make them feel comfortable to talk about culture again.

T5's conclusion was that if teachers do not address the silence that occurs when discussing culture and sensitive topics, then they are basically indirectly asserting that these are subjects that should not be discussed. He concluded that literature is supposed to "go there" and offend a bit so that it can be understood in a safe environment.

T5: Shying away only proves that whatever is being discussed is worth avoiding. I have to let them know that it is better to get offended in literature than in real life.

4.4.2 Discussion

Not being an expert in the culture the chosen literature depicts, or not being aware of the stereotypes associated with the culture, was one of the core problems expressed by the teachers. Excluding multicultural literature due to insufficient knowledge of the target culture was also seen in other studies conducted on teachers' experiences with multicultural literature. The teachers in Stallworth et al's (2006), and Svenson's (2015) study, showed that the lack of cultural knowledge made them exclude certain types of literature. However, the hesitation to use literature from cultures they are unfamiliar with should not mainly be seen in a negative light. While the teachers spoke on the benefits of discussing other nations in literature, they also seemed cautious of being responsible for a negative portrayal of a culture. In 4.2.1, T4 directly mentions how he does not want prejudices to blend into society, which is why he wants his students to be able to process empathy. This could be connected to Quinn's (2021) point on how a poorly discussed stereotype can expand on itself when employed, in this case, in society. In order to avoid this, the teachers selected literature they know they can properly discuss, which shows a level of attentiveness and self-reflexivity about how they represent a specific culture.

Silent students were seen as one of the biggest hindrances when dealing with multicultural literature. The results show that the teachers share Glazer and Seo's (2015) point on how silence hinders growth and understanding in important areas. But as the teachers claimed, much has to do with the teachers' skill in the classroom, which again correlates with

Glazer and Seo's (2015) emphasis on the teachers' role in the equation. By avoiding certain subjects, the students are deprived of gaining an understanding of other cultures. A difference in how to deal with these types of situations can be seen among the teachers' responses where they at times contradicted themselves. T2, T3, and T4 explained that content needs to be discussed so as to understand it, but they also opted for books that avoided specific offensive terms and conflict. This is seen as problematic, especially from an intercultural pedagogical perspective. Intercultural pedagogy after all does not only include smooth and successful encounters between identities and cultures but demands us to navigate conflict and find ways of negotiating and encountering such difficult situations. After all, as Boyd et al. (2015) argue, teachers are the ones that can make change happen by implementing culturally diverse literature in the classroom and by daring to discuss.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The aims of this study were multifaceted. The first aim was to explore the selection process the teachers went through when choosing multicultural books for their curriculum. It was found that the teachers were conscious to represent voices outside of the traditional canon as well as the different backgrounds found in their classrooms. The result from the interviews also demonstrates that the teachers in this study did not implement multicultural literature to satisfy a particular demand, as found in one of the conclusions in Baker's (1997) study. All of the teachers were in agreement that the books they chose should involve an accurate description of a culture instead of reproducing or creating stereotypes and prejudice. These types of books made it possible to work interculturally, which was also an important aspect in their selection processes. However, the teachers in this study felt that they could not teach what they do not know, which made them exclude literature that dealt with cultures unfamiliar to them as well as books they have not read before. This feeling was shared by the teachers found in Stallworth et al's (2006) study. While the reasoning is valid, it also means that students from uncommon, or even obscure, cultures do not have the possibility of being represented. The teachers, however, have also reported that it is possible to work interculturally with almost any given book, regardless of where the book comes from, as long as it is read from an angle that takes into account the presence of diverse identities, contexts, languages, and cultural settings.

The second aim of this study was to explore the benefits the teachers experienced when working interculturally with multicultural literature. The data suggests that the most

value came from making the students engage in discussions about the characters and culture unfamiliar to them. This enthusiasm, regarding the integration of a new culture in their readings, was also found in the teachers from Svensson's study (2015). Learning from each other, discussing stereotypes, overcoming boundaries, comparing cultures, and gaining new perspectives were all seen as beneficial not only to the students but also to society at large. The positive attitudes the teachers displayed toward working interculturally can be compared to the conclusions met in Lenarz's (2002) study where it was found that the use of multicultural literature can raise students' cultural awareness.

The teachers also reported that working interculturally created empathy in the students by making them rethink what they thought they knew. This process led to a growth in mindset that prepares the students for the actual intercultural encounters they will experience in real life. This was especially true when working with stereotypes. The teachers did not shy away from engaging with stereotypes. The data suggest that the shared approach was to stimulate critical thinking in the students by making them view the stereotypes from different angles and having the students discuss these angles with each other. The teachers adopted healthy pedagogical attitudes, which enabled the students to engage in these discussions rather than avoid them. Despite being affected by specific incidents, or admitting that discussing stereotypes is difficult, the teachers were united in thinking that the inclusion of different cultures in literature would promote social harmony. These opinions directly contradict Goo's (2018) criticism of the effectiveness of the inclusion of multicultural literature.

The third research question explored the problems that the teachers have come across when working with multicultural literature. The results show that one of the problems the teachers reported was silence among the students while engaging with sensitive topics including issues such as otherness, identity, and difference. Not communicating as a means to not offend was viewed as damaging since it hindered growth and understanding. Another problematic area was the lack of expertise in a particular culture or being afraid of incorrectly portraying a culture on the process of teaching (as explained in the first paragraph of this section). The teachers also discuss, as I have shown, as part of the challenges they face, incidents they have experienced, either first or second-hand, that have had an impact on what they are willing to discuss in terms of diversity with their students. These results align with the results found in Stallworth et al's (2006) study, where teachers also experienced that the fear of complaints from parents, colleagues, or the community, affects their curriculums and their choices of topics.

The use of interviews gave the six English teachers the chance to share their thoughts and opinions on how to work interculturally with multicultural literature. The results from this study suggest that teachers should be further educated and provided with the necessary pedagogical tools to analyse and conduct a discussion on literary representations of different cultures and identities since the fear of misrepresentation dictated the curriculum and the choices. Furthermore, the results also imply that teachers should spend more time discussing how to approach culturally sensitive topics on race and culture found in literature. For this, they need wide networks and discussion platforms to engage in a meaningful dialogue about the difficulties they experience, and the possibilities opened up by multicultural forms of literature from an interculturally oriented angle — a topic that merits further discussion and research in the field of intercultural pedagogy. Therefore, future projects can focus on different teaching levels. A larger sample size, through questionnaires, would be desirable since it could bring in additional insight into the use of intercultural pedagogy and multicultural literature.

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Appendix 1

Email sent to teachers



Hello,

My name is Bian Solmaz, and I am currently conducting a study for my master thesis in English at Mälardalen University and I am interested in interviewing you. In my study, I will investigate and try to understand how English teachers in upper secondary schools reason over the choice of literature they consider suitable for their teaching group. My study also aims to investigate how and if these English teachers work interculturally in their teaching of multicultural literature. The result of this study has the potential to demonstrate how English teachers think about how multicultural literature can be used to spread social and cultural awareness. Seeing how I am interested in gathering thoughts and opinions on the matter, I considered it appropriate to conduct interviews, which is why I am contacting you.

The interview will be recorded in order to ensure the quality of the interview. The data produced from the interview will only be used for research purposes. You have the power to prematurely end your participation as it is not mandatory for you to participate. I follow the guidelines, issued by the Swedish Research Council, in order to ensure your anonymity. These guidelines also ensure that even the school you work at remains anonymous. If you have understood what I want to achieve in my study, why you are being interviewed, and feel confident with the prevailing research ethics principles, you are encouraged, as proof of shared consent, to sign this document.

I understand the purpose of this study and I accept the terms

If you want to be a part of my study, write your name below:

Name

Date

Appendix 2

Interview guide

- Talk a bit about your reading list. What can you say about the books you have been using?
 - How much freedom do you have when it comes to choosing the curriculum?
 - Are you limited in any way when it comes to choosing the curriculum?
 - What do you primarily consider when choosing books for your students?
- How much consideration is spent on the students in your class, when choosing books? What do you take into account?
 - Difficulty?
 - Diversity?
 - Representation?
 - Length?
 - Opportunities to discuss something specific (perhaps something that is relevant at the moment)?
- How do you implement culturally diverse literature into your class?
- Would you say that your reading list represents a variety of diverse backgrounds? How?
- How much do you think about the authors of the books that you use?
- How much do you think about the accuracy when dealing with culture or nationality in your reading list?
- How diverse would you say your class is?
- How do you approach culturally sensitive topics in your class/lecture?
- Do you have a specific goal you want to achieve using a particular book? A subject that you want the students to reflect on and discuss?
- In which ways do you aim to diversify the literature, and readings, so as to represent the diverse backgrounds of your students?
- Have you ever used literature to discuss tough topics? (Related to diversity). If so, explain.
- Do you encourage discussion on tough topics, in your classroom?
- How do you meet national stereotypes (or general stereotypes), found in literature?
- How do you combat the “silence” that occur in class when dealing with tough topics?
- Do you use literature, multicultural literature or otherwise, to meet the requirements in the curriculum for the English subject? If so, how?
- How do you use multicultural literature to develop social and cultural awareness?
- How much do the students get to learn about other cultures? How much do they get to learn about their own cultures?

- Describe what you enjoy about using multicultural literature in class.
 - Describe an experience, in the classroom, where you experienced success teaching multicultural students.
 - Did you see any changes in your students after completing the module?
- Describe what you dislike about using multicultural literature in class.
 - Describe an experience, in the classroom, where you experienced difficulties teaching multicultural students.
 - Did the experience, or situation, develop any further complications?
- Discussing multicultural literature openly in class can be tough since it is easy to offend someone's beliefs or experiences. How do you manage the discussion and how does it usually go?
- Misrepresentation in multicultural literature is common. Have you had any experiences with it before?
- Have you ever been met with strong opinions, from the students or the school, about a book you have chosen?
- Has recent events (Me-too, Black lives matter, covid pandemic for example) affected your readings in class in anyway?
 - Have you altered your curriculum?
 - Have these events created specific discussions in class?
 - Has it created any problems in your course?
 - Has it made it any easier discussion diversity and culture?