A Replication of An Intercultural Approach in The National Tests of English

A Text- and Document Analyses of The National Tests in English Year 2000, 2005 and 2010

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ABSTRACT

The intercultural approach carries the same values as the democratic concept, which is the fundamental platform of the curriculum, Läroplanen. Keywords such as empathy, openness, democracy, education, critical thinking, human rights, identity, equality and understanding are some of the values that the democratic and the intercultural approach carry. The question is how these values are replicated in the education and the materials that are used in school? This is what this research is going to be focusing on. To answer this question, the research is going to analyze three national tests in English in grade nine. These three tests are the primary source of this study and they are from the years 2000, 2005 and 2010. The main focus of this research is to see how the intercultural approach is replicated in the three tests. The range of the national tests is to see if there has been a development in the intercultural approach in the last decade.

The conclusion of this research shows that there is a Western norm that permeates throughout the production of the national tests, which contradicts the goals of an intercultural and democratic education. Even though there is an effort to try to correspond the values of the curriculum, there is still a lack of knowledge from the producer’s counterpart. The producers of the National tests have to be aware of the powerful position they possess when making the tests. They have the power to share their ideas about another culture. The stories should promote values that are independent from prejudiced assumptions. Some may argue that the bias that is shared in the national test is hard to see, since we share the same frame of reference as the producers. This makes it harder to reveal prejudiced assumptions about another culture since there are no binary opposites or contrasts to make bias noticeable. But this fact could be avoided if you have the curriculum as your point of departure when producing the tests. The intercultural approach is to acknowledge cultural differences, without generalizing people and cultures. The intercultural approach is based on promoting knowledge about cultural differences, to avoid alienation that develops into prejudice assumptions about different cultural phenomena. The intercultural approach should contribute to establishing and encourage respect for each person’s integrity and belief. The result of this research shows that the National Agency of Education has not managed to fulfil these values, even after more than 3 decades of experience.

KEYWORDS: Intercultural education, national tests, curriculum, democracy, prejudice, equality, knowledge and openness
1. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

1.1 Introduction

Over the last four decades, there has been a change in Swedish society from being an invariable, homogeneous culture, to becoming one of the most multicultural societies in the world (Lahdenperä & Lorentz 2010:15). This progression has led to changing priorities and values within the education system, which are evident in the national curriculum for the different subjects and levels of the education system. The curriculum is written by the National Agency of Education (Skolverket), which is a governmental institution with their main focus on the education system of Sweden. The National Agency of Education also produces national tests in the English subject, which Swedish pupils take in grade three, six, and nine. These tests should according to the aims of the curriculum involve democratic values such as respect, tolerance, human rights, solidarity, mutual understanding, equality and social justice. These values are shared by the intercultural concept (Lahdenperä 2004:15). The term *intercultural* is only mentioned once in the curriculum, but the intercultural approach is a way to help teachers to practice and achieve the goals that are promoted in the curriculum. Since our society has become heterogeneous, it has become more important to increase the knowledge and understanding of our various cultures to prevent prejudice and alienation towards cultures that we are not a part of. The intercultural approach promotes various methods and ideas of how teachers can prevent xenophobia, which is one of the goals that the curriculum emphasizes (Lgr. 11:9).

English teachers should according to the curriculum provide an opportunity for the pupils to develop knowledge and understanding of different living conditions in areas/countries where English is used (Lgr 11:32) and make education suitable for all students, irrespective of background or personal beliefs. In Lgr 11 it is stated that the pupils should be able to relate to and understand what is mediated in school through comparison to their own life experiences (Lgr 11:10). When one is dealing with people with different needs, cultures and backgrounds, such a task can be quite hard to fulfil. Teachers have to analyze and reconsider the materials used in an effort to encourage students to develop democratic perspectives and thinking. Lgr 11 states:

> It is important to have an international perspective, to be able to understand one’s own reality in a global context and to create international solidarity, as well as prepare for a society with close contacts across cultural and national borders. Having an international perspective also involves developing an understanding of cultural diversity within the country. (Lgr 2011:11).
The curriculum thus highlights the importance of having an international perspective, where pupils get the opportunity to develop an understanding of cultural diversities, nationally and internationally. Pupils should consequently develop the ability to understand that people perceive the world differently, and that one's own perspective is just one among many perspectives. From a teaching point-of-view, this could be done by adopting an intercultural approach in one's teaching by inviting and integrating other cultural influences in the education.

1.2 Aims

The primary aim of this essay is to find out how the *intercultural approach* is conveyed in the National tests. The ‘intercultural approach’ represents the democratic values promoted in the National curriculum (Läroplanen 2011) for Swedish schools and these values are the point of departure when producing the National tests of English. The secondary aim is to find out if the National tests of English have changed over the years since the National Agency of Education introduced the concept ‘intercultural approach’ in the National curriculum.

The research questions for this essay are:

- How do the National tests in English replicate an intercultural approach?
- Has there been a progression in the production of the National Tests of English since the intercultural approach became one of the concepts that the National Agency of Education promotes?
2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Overview of the chapter

Before presenting the history behind the national tests and their purpose, some essential terms for this research need to be clarified. The terms *interculturalism*, *multiculturalism*, and *intercultural education* in particular, play a major role in this study as they form a point of departure for how the research has been carried out. These terms will be discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3. The chapter is concluded by a brief historical background to the National tests (in 2.4) and a presentation of the contents of the National tests (in 2.5).

2.2 Interculturalism and Multiculturalism

The term ‘interculturalism’, which literally means ‘between cultures’ refers to the meeting and interaction between different cultures. The Swedish National Encyclopaedia describes the intercultural concept as: "...a process in which people with different languages and cultures communicate and interact with each other" (Swedish National Encyclopaedia 2013). School is an example of an environment where people with various cultural backgrounds meet and have different cultural affiliations, such as ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. The advantage of interculturalism is the cultivation of increased learning and understanding of various cultural, religious, ethnic and social backgrounds among students and teachers (Lorentz 2009:118). The term ‘interculturalism’ is often used in the same context as the term ‘multiculturalism’, which literally means ‘more than one culture’. Yvonne Leeman claims that the difference between *intercultural* and *multicultural* is that the term *intercultural*, emphasizes the cultural meetings and the interaction between cultures, whereas the term *multicultural* implies that two cultures live side by side without any interaction (Lahdenperä 2004:13). According to Hans Lorentz, ‘multiculturalism’ is a term that is used when describing how people with different experiences, social class differences and cultural backgrounds live together in a society (2009:118). Anders Moor adds that it has nothing to do with the social relationships between these people (2011:43). The multicultural aspect describes the state of an environment, rather than the social relation among these cultural groups (Lorentz, 2009:43-45).

The school environment has become multicultural in different aspects, encompassing a range of ethnicities, as well as social and cultural backgrounds, among students, teachers, principals, and other staff members. This is why the intercultural concept has become more important aspect to integrate in the education, because it is a way to help these groups to cross the cultural boarders that exist through knowledge and interaction (Lorentz, 2009:43-45).
The National Agency of Education (Skolverket) has chosen to establish an international perspective that will contribute to more tolerant attitudes and give a greater understanding of our diversities. Lorentz explains that ‘interculturality’ represents the educational aspect of the intercultural concept and it is based on education, influence and action (2009:53).

2.3 Intercultural Education

As early as 1985 the Swedish government emphasized the importance of having an intercultural education (Andersson and Reinfetti 2001:5). The intercultural education has its point of departure in the democratic values (Phillips 2009:33). The prefix *inter*, stands for human interaction, while *culture* is a system of meaning where there is a consensus of shared artifacts, traditions, beliefs and norms. Culture is often associated with ethnicity, gender and class (Lahdenperä, 2004:13). Lahdenperä claims that the intercultural education is not a subject but rather an approach that should be practiced in all subjects (2004:11). Intercultural education involves open communication between people who have different cultures, histories, experiences and beliefs. The communication creates a mutual understanding of our differences. The Swedish National Encyclopaedia describes the concept of Intercultural education as "knowledge and practices in parenting, education and training" (Swedish National Encyclopaedia, 2013). According to Pirjo Lahdenperä (2004), teachers can implement intercultural education through their communication and social interaction—the key elements to intercultural teaching. Pedagogical knowledge, thinking practices, and behaviours have to adapt to the multicultural development that is taking place in a modern society, such as that in Sweden. Teachers have the task to create communication between pupils with different cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds so that they develop an understanding of cultural differences. Environments where teachers contribute to creating an atmosphere between individuals, contributes to the learning of others’ cultures as well as one’s own. Lahdenperä argues that since our society has been influenced by various impressions of different cultures and religions, intercultural education is an approach that should be applied in all subjects to get a perception of our various life perspectives (2004:11). The curriculum states that, “Education should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” and “The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between
Lahdenperä (2004:33) claim that the multicultural society has contributed to creating new challenges for teachers. Teachers should, according to the curriculum (Lpo 11), adapt their teaching to reflect the surrounding multicultural school and society. It is therefore of utmost importance that teachers have an understanding of the values and perspectives represented in the multicultural classroom. According to Maria Borgström (2004), when planning classes, teachers should have their point of departure in the national curriculum. The intercultural education is a concept that could help teachers to practice and convey these democratic values. The intercultural education is a platform, which opens up a process to learn about social and cultural differences (Lahdenperä, 2004:38).

Borgström explains that the intercultural approach is based on empathy and openness. By internalizing these two concepts in the education, it contributes to a better understanding and a more open communication between people with different backgrounds (2004:130). Lorentz (2009) points out that it is important for teachers to create opportunities where pupils from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds get a chance to learn about their similarities and differences (2009:46).

Lahdenperä claims that for us to be able to avoid stereotyped, pre-judgmental, racist, discriminative and social inequalities, teaching has to convey the fundamental values that are reachable through intercultural didactics that transmissions knowledge and understanding about the “Other” (Lahdenperä 2004:15). The intercultural approach should balance hegemonies so that no one has he power to define or describe the “other” culture or ethnicity (Lahdenperä 2004:27). This is also promoted in the curriculum, where it says:

No one should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment or other degrading treatment. Such tendencies should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be confronted with knowledge, open discussion and active measures (Lgr. 2011:9).

Lahdenperä’s (1995) claims that teachers should be aware that their own cultural background and education, because it can entail cultural filters that can limit contact with people from different cultural backgrounds. This means that teachers have to be open and willing to learn from and about their students. She gives example of getting to know the student’s parents and
their cultural background. She even gives an example of getting to know the parent’s encounter with the Swedish culture to get an insight of how our reality can be perceived from another cultural perspective (1995:10). This is why it is important that teachers are well aware of their own values and interpretations about other cultures to be able to reach an intercultural environment. Ulla Lundgren claims that to be able to reach the dimension of an intercultural approach in the second language learning. Keywords such as democracy education, critical analyses thinking, human rights, conflict resolution and identity fits into the governing the national and international curricula (2004:34).

2.4 Historical Background to the Use of National Tests

Originally, the national tests were not meant to be controlled by the government agency such as the National Agency of Education (Skolverket). Instead the tests were simply intended to function as a tool for teachers to measure their pupils’ knowledge, and to help teachers to develop their teaching. Frits Wigforss, the creator of the national tests, explicitly emphasized these points when introducing the concept of national tests (Lundahl 2010:19). The idea behind the national test was thus that teachers should get insight into how well their pupils were doing. The tests would make it possible for the teacher to see if the student had attained the knowledge requirements that were expected at a certain grade, however, this soon changed. Carita Hassler–Göransson developed Wigforss’ ideas about the national test. She mixed Wigforss original idea with a spelling test called “The Iowa Spelling Scales” from the United States. The national tests were soon seen as a device that could help the teachers to get an equivalent grading nationwide. This was not Wigforss’ initial purpose because he could see the possibilities and dilemmas with the tests from the start, problems which still persist.

The national tests could be helpful in the process of developing an average knowledge that could be measured nationally, but Wigforss also saw that the tests could inhibit the teachers from developing knowledge. He pointed out that the national tests contributed to strict frames that controlled the teachers (Lundahl, 2010:20). In other words, they restricted teachers to a specific, rigid frame. Lundahl explains that the national tests take away the teachers’ responsibility to stimulate pupils in their poor performances. The national test contain elements of guidance, i.e. the tests make it possible for teachers to blame poor results on pupils’ lack of intelligence, rather than questioning the teachers’ ability to stimulate the pupils’ quest for knowledge (2010: 34 & 168). Lundahl (2010:168) also highlights another aspect of the national tests, namely, that politicians use the national test as a prescriptive scale to which Swedish schools are held accountable.
The realization of the effectiveness of the national tests in giving a national overview of the standard level of knowledge, led to a national debate (Lundahl, 2010:27). The tests gave schools a common platform to use as a point of departure when motivating their grading (Lundahl, 2010: 41-46). However, opinions differed on how to get a national equivalent grading system. The national tests appeared to be the perfect solution to how to get an equivalent and unitary school form where the whole nation could act and expect certain levels of knowledge and performance - from both teachers and pupils. For this reason, the national tests were made compulsory in 1953 (Lundahl, 2010:21).

In a historical perspective, the primary purposes of the national tests’ have been to report results to teachers, schools and municipalities, and to enable these to evaluate and monitor results for further progress (Lundahl, 2010:165). Lundahl (2010:133) claims that the general view of the national tests is today that they make it possible to concretize what is supposed to be achieved at a certain class level.

2.5 The Contents of the National Tests in English

Today the national test is a mandatory test in almost all subjects. In the English National Test, there is always a theme that permeates the whole test. Many teachers cooperate in the design of the National Tests. Most teachers work in elementary school, but highschool teachers and English native speakers have also influenced the outcome of the national tests (Skolverkets Bedömningsmatris, 2010:3). All the tests that have been produced are based on an analysis of the Swedish curriculum, Lgr 11, and on national and international research on English acquisition and proficiency. Since 1980, the curriculum of English (Lgr 80) focuses mostly on communication skills. It is in Lgr 80 that the intercultural communicative competence approach is initiated. Students are supposed to be able to do the following:

- to read and understand a text
- to listen/ understand and respond to texts or speech (interactive achievements)
- to produce texts and speech.

The focus is on the practical part of the language and not on the theoretical part. In all four parts of the national test (reading, writing, listening and speaking) an intercultural approach is supposed to permeate the tasks and the themes that the students can relate to (Lundahl, 2010:133).
3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Primary material
In order to investigate how the intercultural approach is replicated in The National tests of English, the research will utilize the tests in year 2000, 2005 and 2010 for pupils in 9th grade as the primary source for this essay. All National tests should be considered a concretization of the perception of knowledge indicated in the national curriculum for each subject. The national tests in grade nine are chosen since they are the final test and a summery of the various abilities that the pupils should have achieved in a mandatory education. This includes the intercultural aspect where pupils should encounter material that introduces a variation of cultures.

3.2 Methods
To enable an analysis that shows how the intercultural approach is replicated in the national tests of English, I have chosen to use a model created by Bank’s. The model consists of five different features that contribute to helping teacher to promote an intercultural approach in their education (Stier & Sandström 2009:15). The five features show if the teacher uses an intercultural approach or not. Here are the five features, which form the foundation of the analyses:

1. Content integration
   The first feature involves using different subject matters from different cultures in the school teaching. This introduces pupils to many different cultures.

2. Construction of knowledge
   Teachers help students to develop an approach to the construction of knowledge by highlighting how different aspects and cultural assumptions have an impact on how knowledge is constructed (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15). In other words, teachers help their pupils to understand how culture influences the knowledge we possess.

3. The reduction of prejudice assumptions
   Teachers will be through methods of teaching work to prevent bias. By working actively against prejudice, the goal is for teachers to help students grow into individuals with an open and positive attitude towards other groups.
4. *Fair education*

By adapting the teaching so that it becomes fair for everyone, i.e. all pupils can relate to the subjects taught, all pupils have the same opportunities to learn regardless of background. This can be achieved by not only using elements from the Swedish culture, but also integrate other cultural influences in the education.

5. *Empowering*

This feature focuses on those who are responsible for the school, i.e. how they should promote a school environment where all cultural groups feel at home. This is done by having the theories and values of the intercultural approach as their point of departure in their daily work. This creates a school environment that increases the contact between different groups and breeds understanding and respect of our differences (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15).

3.2.1 Document Analysis – Text Analysis and Comparative Analysis

A document analysis was selected as the most appropriate method for this study as it analyses texts with their point of departure in specific criteria (Stukát, 2005). This method uses both text analysis and comparative analysis (Stukát, 2005). All text analyses of the National tests have been subjected to my interpretations. As Begrström and Boréus (2000) point out, it is entirely feasible that other readers would interpret my texts differently depending on their previous knowledge and perceptions, but this is unavoidable. Comparative analysis of the National tests from the years 2000, 2005 and 2010 is used in the study to examine whether there have been any notable changes in the use of the intercultural approach during the last decade.

The text analysis was based on Bank’s model of features in the intercultural approach (Stier & Sandström, 2009). The criteria selected for the analysis includes a social aspect, an ethical aspect, critical thinking, problem solving, and local to global perspective, which together form the democratic perspective that permeate the curricula and education system of Sweden. To be able to make more complex judgements, the text analyses were carried out manually. It was carried out by summarizing one story at a time and compared the content of the story, with Bank’s model to see if the story involved any of those features. All stories contained intercultural features. In the next phase, the summarized texts were compared with
each other to see if there has been a development in the intercultural approach during the last decade.

The texts were then compared with each other to see if the intercultural approach had taken a greater part in the production of the tests or not. The comparison of the three national tests was systematic, which according to Hellspng (2001) is necessary for a comparative analysis. Due to the limited timeframe of this research, the document analysis is limited to one part called B1 of the three parts of the National tests. B1 focuses on the student’s receptive ability to read and understand instructions and different types of texts, and this part contains four to five tests.

Bergström and Boréus (2000) argue that the validity of a study is whether the study can answer the questions or the aims of the study. Bergström and Boréus (2000) highlights a validity problem that is relevant in a text analysis, namely that one may interpret the text based on a subjective perception. This research might have overanalysed the national tests in order to find supportable statements to fulfil the criteria for the theories that are used for this research. According to Stukát (2005), the subjective perspective is often involved and impossible to depart from when analysing and interpreting texts. As for the comparative analysis, which aims to answer whether there has been any development or change in the intercultural approach during the last decade, the claim of this research is that there is no validity problem with the proviso that, it is a subjective interpretation that lies as the basis for the comparison of the three national tests.

According to Bergstrom and Boréus (2000), reliability illustrates whether the measurements and interpretations of the study have been carefully executed, i.e. if the investigator has summarized and interpreted the stories in a correct way. The comparisons and interpretations of this study have been as meticulous as possible. However, it is hard to get away from the fact that the analyses are based on subjective interpretation. Therefore, one cannot rule out the possibility of having overanalysed the features to do with the intercultural approach. Reliability also involves reflection on the inter-subject aspect when doing a research, which means that a random researcher could conduct the same study with the same materials and analysis and arrive at the same result (Bergstrom and Boréus 2000). The argument to that is that a text analysis and comparative textual analysis could differ, as they are based on a subjective interpretation. As completely valid and genuine inter-subjectivity is impossible (Bergstrom and Boréus 2000), this research has strived to be as impartial as possible by bringing awareness to the subjective perspective and personal influences that could intervene when making a research of this kind.
4.0 RESULTS

4.1 National Test of English in Year 2000

The theme of the National Test of 2000 is about *Choices and Opportunities*. Presented below, is a summarized version of the national tests of year 2000. The stories will later be analysed from Bank’s intercultural model.

**Task 1: Mounted patrol**

This text presents what Bank’s (2009) call “Content integration” which involves subject matters from different cultures, which you integrate in the materials that are used in class. In this story we get to know how the police in Portland, USA work and what kind of animals they use in their force to help them do their job. The students are introduced to an American culture where you get an insight of some work ethics and criteria’s that a horse needs to fulfil to be a part of the police force. The horses that are used in the force are well trained and proficiently selected. This text also includes an aspect of the intercultural model that deals with the “Reduction of Prejudice Assumptions” (Stier & Sandström 2009). Here the students might confront some of their prejudice assumptions towards American movies and cowboys. They see that the horses that are used by the police have to have a certain personal character to be a part of the unit. The horse has to show control and calmness, where it is free from abnormal behaviours and habits such as a bad diet or aggressive features. The horses begin their service at the age of seven because they are more mature at that age. This information signals that there are standards that the horse need to fulfil, which has nothing to do with the looks of the horse, but rather about the matureness and personal character that plays a great part in whether it fits in the police force or not.

**Task 2: News Around the World**

All the stories in task 2 are versions of different situations or problems that different countries and cultures encounter. The students can relate to some of these stories because some of them are broadcast on Swedish television or newspapers. But there are some stories that probably never will be a part of a Swedish student’s life. If we look at newsfeed E, we can see that there are students in Kenya that are threatened to be dropped out of school because of their economic situation. This is a situation that is far away from a Swedish student’s reality. It has been several decades since this was an issue that the Swedish society had to deal with. This task is an example of what could be seen from Bank’s concept of “Contents Integration” (Stier...
The story presents a subject, an economical problem, which is a great problem in a lot of countries. In some cases it has become a subject that is associated with certain countries. The economic issue is integrated in the subject matter of the national test of English. This is a way to present and develop different perspectives of a country or culture, which contributes to knowledge, which is what “Content Integration” is about (Stier & Sandström, 2009). The material that the students are introduced to could give them another aspect of a country and gives a contrast of their own reality and culture. This also involves Bank’s concept of “Construction of Knowledge”, where either the teacher or the materials that are used in school, helps the students to understand how their culture affects their perception of the world (Stier & Sandström, 2009). In this case the students might not be aware of their own social and economic benefits because they have nothing to compare it with. But the text gives an insight of how other countries situation can be, which gives them a contrast to their own everyday life.

The news stories such as “Unemployment Up” (story A), “Sailboard Blockade” (story B), “Survivors Sought” (story D), “Ferry Withdrawn” (story F) and “Walk-Out Talks” (story G) are topics that the student can refer to, since these situations have taken place in Sweden too. These stories could be referred to Bank’s concept of “Righteous Pedagogy” which means that the materials that are used by the school are adjusted so that the students can understand and feel a part of what is mediated in class (Stier & Sandström, 2009). As we can see, this is something that the curriculum also promotes where it says, “Teaching should be adapted to each pupil’s circumstances and needs” (Lgr 11:10). According to Bank’s concept of “Righteous Pedagogy”, it contributes to giving all students the same possibilities to learn and understand what is mediated, because they can recognize and relate to the topics that are treated (Stier & Sandström, 2009). This is something that the curriculum also promotes in the education. The curriculum states that the school should mediate matters that the student can relate to through comparison to their own life experiences (Lgr 11:10).

All these stories are also what Bank’s call “Empowering”, where the contents of the text gives information about different cultures and ethncial groups, which increases the understanding for other individuals and their cultures. This is something that the curriculum promotes, where it states that, “the school is responsible for ensuring that each pupil on completing compulsory school… can interact with other people based on knowledge of similarities and differences in living conditions, culture, language, religion and history…” (Lgr11:15).
Stier and Sandström claim that an intercultural approach could be developed through the materials that are presented in school. The sources that are applied could increase the contact between cultural groupsthrough the encounter of various matters that are presented in the materials that the teachers use in the education. This will contribute to an understanding and respect for various cultures (2009:15). To bring up different cultures news feed like they do in this part of the national test, is according to Banks (2009) concept, an example of how to give students an insight of what other countries encounter and deal with in their cultures. As mentioned before, some of these news are situations that the Swedish culture never has dealt with and therefore the students would have never known about if it wasn’t for our globalized world where we quickly can take part of other countries and cultures issues (Lorentz, 2007:43). This contributes to giving an understanding of how situations that take place on the other side of the world, could come to affect our society and country that we live in today. The situations that have been taking place in different countries of the world, is one of the main reasons to our multicultural society that we live in today (Lahdenperä & Lorentz 2010:15).

Task 3: Surfing the Net

The story in task 3 is, according to Bank´s analyze concept of an intercultural approach, an example of "Content Integration" where the material that is presented treats a subject from a sub-culture that is known in many different countries (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15). This subject is something that the Swedish students can relate to, because it is something that is current amongst Swedish youngsters too. As in New Zealand, it is classified as a sub-culture where there are graffiti artists that are famous in this genre of culture, which makes it easier for the students to recognize their own culture in the newspaper clipping that is presented. This reflects the "Empowering" concept, where the materials that are used in school create an understanding between different cultures (Stier & Sandstöm, 2009:15). In this case it might not be that there are any differences in the cultures of graffiti in Sweden and New Zealand, but the national test show that there is similarities in the Swedish and New Zealand sub-culture (Lgr. 11:15). Stier & Sandström claim that the materials that are used in school could contribute to increasing the contact between different cultures and groups by presenting a culture, or like in this case, a sub-culture, that the students can relate to and understand. Since this story reflects a sub-culture that is quit similar in Sweden, it is a way to increase the contact between two different countries by showing that there are similarities in our cultures.
This contributes to increasing the contact between two different countries and cultures, which is what the intercultural approach is about (Lorentz, 2009:43).

**Task 4: Making the Grade**

The story in task 4 replicate Bank´s concept of “Fair education”, which is the aspect where the teachers adapt the materials and the tutoring to something that students can relate to, no matter cultural background (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15). In this story it can be seen in this boys situation, where he has a teacher that says that he will never be able to learn English. This is a feeling that students can encounter when moving to another country where they have a new language to learn and a new culture to adapt to. This can also be something that students can encounter when studying, or encountering situations in their personal life where the feelings can be too overwhelming to the point of loosing their self-confidence and belief in their ability to overcome an obstacle or situation. The story is an inspiration for students that encounter communication- or social problems to never give up. This is an example of a story that pupils can relate to and find courage to overcome obstacles (Lgr 11:15)

**Task 5: Road to Success**

The text in task 5 is an example of how the culture we live in affects the knowledge we possess, which is a part of the “Construction of Knowledge”. By giving the students various perspectives of other cultural situations and influences, gives the student a perception that leads to an understanding of how people live in other parts of the world. This is a combination of Bank´s perspectives of “Construction of Knowledge” and “Reduction of Prejudice Assumptions”, which claim that the education that gives various perspectives of cultures contributes to respect for other people and cultures, because they have an understanding of what use to be alienated for them, thanks to the materials that the teacher has presented for them.

The story could also be seen from Bank´s perspective of “Content Integration”. Content Integration focuses on how the teaching includes subjects from other cultures. In this story it would be the fact that Zambia has poor conditions and gives you a perspective about things that we here in Sweden take for granted. For example, Emmanuel works out an irrigation system to have water for his house and for his vegetables. This irrigation system helps him to grow vegetables that he starts selling, which helps their poor situation.
4.2 The National Test of English Year 2005

The theme of the national tests in year 2005 was about *Peace, War and Human Rights*. These three concepts will be the stories point of departure in this section.

**Task 1: Places to Go**

The text in task 1 engages all five perspectives according to Bank’s intercultural approach. Here we see an example of ”Content Integration”, where the text involves subjects from various countries and cultures. The students get a perspective of the similarities and differences of these countries when answering the questions for the assignment. Some of the subjects that the student gets to know are the size, population and capital of each nation. There is also information about when the best time is to go and visit each country, since there are periods that are too hot, rainy, dry or humid. There is also information about what you should do and not, called “DOES AND DON’TS” when you visit.

In the information about Malta, it is written that you should not wear shorts when visiting churches, because people will likely be defended. This implicitly indicates that there is a religious aspect that one should take in to consideration when visiting certain places in the country. This is an example of showing a cultural phenomenon, an ideology that can be an alienated aspect to some students, or can differ to other religious ideologies. The text introduces a perception that shows an ideological behaviour that indicates respect to places they consider as being sacred. Even though Sweden belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Swedish Church that many students visit, especially on feasts such as Christmas holiday, it might not occur to them that there are certain *rules* for what you can and cannot wear in church. This is something that used to be a part of the Swedish culture, but the ideology is not practiced as it used to and has therefore become a vague idea to some students. The text could also contribute to concretely identify the Swedish culture by being able to see the similarities of the religious belief in Sweden and Malta. This reinforces the student’s cultural identity, which is a part of the goals in the curricula (Lgr 11:15).

In the information about Malaysia they encourage tourists to visit their rubber and tea plantations, which is a part of their culture and what they are known for. It is a serious crime to buy or transport illegal goods, where the punishment for trafficking is extremely severe. The information also entails that a great part of the countries export of tea, goes to England. In the history part of the facts about Malaysia, we see that the country has belonged to Buddhist Empire, a Hindu kingdom, the Netherlands and finally Britain. It became
independent year 1963. The information also reveals that Malaysia is the most inhabited country of all four countries, with a population of 23.3 (year 2005).

Botswana was also colonialized by the British Empire until 1963. The best time to visit Botswana is between August-October, because the other months are too dry. In the “DOS and DON’T S” it says that you should be careful if you decide to camp on your own. You should keep your food safe from wild animals and get up early, because the animals are mostly active just after sunrise. You should also consider not wearing blue clothes, since the tsetse flies are drawn to the colour, which could end up in an allergic reaction.

In the facts about Barbados we see that the Arawak Indians originally inhabited the country, before becoming a part of the English Empire. Barbados became an independent state 1966. The information reveals that it is not a proper time to come and visit the country between July-October, since it is a hurricane season. During the other seasons, the climate is very nice. If you come to visit Barbados you should try a raw cane on their sugar plantations. If you like to gamble, you have come to the wrong country since they do not have any casinos.

This information gives the student an insight of various subjects that a culture has, which is what “Content Integration” is about. Here the student gets to know the various histories and global relations that the countries have had, which can give the students a greater understanding of how these historical matters have influenced our contemporary society. In the text we can see that the Malaysia, Botswana and Barbados have been British colonies, which explains why some of these countries have English as their second language acquisition. This leads us to the concept of Bank’s perspective of “Construction of Knowledge”, which involves the teacher’s role to make the student understand that our culture affects the way we perceive our world. The facts that are shared in the text show that there are things in other cultures that might be unfamiliar to them, because we do not share the same frame of reference when reading texts or involving in situations. The facts that are introduced in the assignment, lets the student get a minor insight of how other cultures think or act in situations that might not be familiar to a Swedish student, for example when visiting a church. This gives the student a better understanding of cultures differences, which is a part of Bank’s perspective of “Reduction of prejudice assumptions”. Stier & Sandström claim that the teacher is in charge of helping pupils to become more open and develop patient attitudes towards people with other cultures. The authors claim that this can be achieved through materials that the teachers use, where different cultures are presented, which will contribute to not making other cultural phenomenon as abnormal, but rather as something that the student can understand and maybe relate to (2009:15). The text is an example of how different
cultures could be integrated and presented in the education, each with their own cultural agenda, which contributes to giving the student a perspective of the similarities and differences of the countries that are presented. This is something that the curriculum emphasizes as a part of the responsibilities that the school has in compulsory school (Lgr 11:15). This goes hand in hand with Bank’s concept of “Empowering”, which involves creating an environment where the contact between different cultural groups is increased. This can, according to Bank’s concepts, be achieved if the students can identify themselves in an environment, where there are various influences of cultures that the student can relate to and not feel as being left out of what is conveyed in class. Each culture should feel as a supplement where the teacher lifts up and finds didactic ways to awaken a genuine interest in the students, where they are eager to get to know each other’s cultural differences. This breeds respect and understanding of our cultural differences and perceptions (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15). This text is giving a perspective and interesting information about cultures that the teacher could develop.

**Task 2: Talking About Things**

The text in task 2 has influences of an intercultural approach imbedded in the questions and answers. This can be shown in the way they talk about the American election, which is a subject that plays a great part in the American culture. They also talk about weather or not one has to have a passport when crossing the boarder between the US and Mexico, which is something that the students might not be aware of, since we who live in Europe, don’t have to show our passports when traveling to countries that are members in the European Union (EU). This is also a feature of Bank’s model called “Construction of Knowledge”, where the teacher develops the student’s ability to understand how one’s own cultural reference affects the way you perceive the world. But by using different materials that treats different cultural matters, where the teacher bring up subjects and cultural assumptions, gives the student a perspective of how one’s own cultural reference has contributed to creating assumptions about other cultures. This helps to reduce prejudice assumptions about cultures, which is a part of Bank’s intercultural development (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15). The curriculum claims that by bringing awareness of your own cultural origin, contributes to providing a secure identity, which is important to develop “…together with the ability to understand and empathise with the values and conditions of others” (Lgr.11: 9). This is something that becomes more evident in the following chapter.
Task 3: Writing from Africa

The text for task 3 reveals an intercultural approach in the sense that it has a “Content Integration”, where various cultural subjects are presented. The American girl shares her emotions, where she talks about how she tries new styles of clothes and tries to be at the places where all the ”popular” people hang out, but she soon realizes that this lifestyle does not suit her. The story starts by inviting the students to something they can relate to and then she describes her trip to another continent and culture, which might not be something that the students are familiar with. She describes the nature of Zambia, with all their animals, where she gets to see things that one might never see in Sweden. She tells about how friendly the people are to her, especially the man with the army suit and machine gun. Her storytelling is a way to build curiosity around another culture and a way to initiate an intercultural approach, but it can also be a romanticized depiction of a culture, which makes it rather unrealistic for the students to comprehend, or build up prejudice assumptions about another culture. The complications about this story starts when the American girl describes her last night in Zambia, where there is an undertone of her ideas about the African people that comes through in her description.

She associates an African woman that sings a song, to being a song “her people” have sung for who knows how many years. This is a generalizing assumption and is something that occurs when there is a lack of knowledge about people and cultures. Another problematic point about this description is the question of describing one random woman as a representation of “her people”, which includes 54 countries and approximately a population of 900 million people. This story results in being a generalized conclusion and assumption about one of the largest continents of the world. In the story we get to know that they are in Zambia and get an insight of how she experiences this new culture, but she draws the vast conclusion of the some random woman. To draw a parallel to this discussion is to say that a European woman sings a song that belongs to “her people”, which in this case would be one single, blonde woman, which represents whole Europe.

4.3 The National Test of Year 2010

The subject that permeates in the national test of 2010 is about “The Quality of Life”. The test contains three assignments that in different ways test the pupil’s ability to read and understand texts of various genres. All the stories that are presented in the following section are a summarized version of the stories.
**Task 1: Melbourne**

The text in task 1 contains the feature “Content Integration” where it integrates different subjects from cultures. We can see this on the way they portray the food cultures in the country, where there are Asian and European influences, such as Greek, Spanish, Italian and Vietnamese food presented in the text. You also get information about the countries cultural places, where they present places such as the Opera House or different tours that will show you how different cultural perspectives are a part of the country. There is also a historical perspective embedded in the facts. This is shown in the part where they talk about Australia’s seventeen different locations that will show you their historical influences from Europe, which has left an imprint on Australia. The text replicates the culture of the city by explaining what tourists can do to get a greater understanding of the various influences that is a part of the Australian society. This is an example of how students can be introduced to an intercultural perspective. The materials, which in this case is the national tests, mediates that the country has influences from different countries and they want tourists to visit these places, when coming to Australia.

**Task 2: Fireflies**

The story in task 2 shows how an American woman goes against her principles as she is driving home one day and sees two young German hitchhikers. She stops to pick them up, which she normally never would have done if it wasn’t for the thought related to her own children. She feels a sense of empathy for the two students and would want someone to pick up her children if they were in the same situation. Her empathy for other people also comes through in the way she shows her hospitality, where they get to take a shower, eat and sleep over. Bank’s intercultural model contains a feature called “Construction of Knowledge”, which treats the fact of how cultural influences affects the way we think. The woman talks about her principles of not picking up two strangers, because that is something that you know that you’re not suppose to do. The woman has another connection to this situation, which is that she has children in the same age as these two students. This fact makes her react differently and decides to help them, no matter what country or culture they come from. This gesture of kindness develops in to a long lasting friendship, where the students continue writing to her to share their stories and lives, which is a way to show their gratitude for her hospitality. From an intercultural perspective this is a way to show how two different cultures meet and interact, which in this story is triggered by an actions of solidarity and empathy to people that are in need. The curricula highlight the importance of creating international solidarity (Lpo
where people can develop an understanding to other people’s situation, which this story shows through the action of the American woman. The difference here is that the woman can relate her action to the emotions that she has to her own children. According to Bank’s intercultural perspective, the teacher can help students to develop empathy and understanding through the materials that the teacher use (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15). Bank’s “Reduction of Prejudice Assumptions” treats the fact of the teacher’s responsibility to present various materials that contributes to developing an understanding of people from different cultures and social situations. This is an example of how people, despite their cultural values, show empathy to people in need, just as the curriculum promotes (Lgr. 11:9). The text also presents Bank’s ”Content Integration”, where you treat subjects from various cultures (Stier & Sandström, 2009:15). In this story we can see that the American woman talks about how the student gets to see fireflies, which is the name of the story. This is a common fly that is known in America. This situation appears when the students come to the woman’s house to have a meal by the open fire, where small flies suddenly appear as it becomes darker. Here you get a sense of how proud the woman is about the little bugs, which is explained in the way she feels when she sees them. The story also shows an American food culture, where they grill marshmallows under the fire. These subjects are examples of how subjects from different cultures can be embedded in the text (Stier & Sandström, 2009). This story replicates an intercultural approach where it shows how something unfamiliar and strange can turn out to be something that you can relate to and understand, if you give it a chance, just like this woman and her two new German friends.

Task 3: Teenage Years

All five stories in task three replicate an intercultural approach from different perspectives. Each decade has its own cultural perspective where clothes, music and lifestyles change depending on when and where you grow up.

During the 60s the hippie era took over with its counter culture. The music shifted to an indie/rock culture where the only thing that mattered was peace and love. In the story you get a sense of the time where most of the people still lived on the countryside but started to move towards the big cities to be a part of the new and cool generation.

In the 70s we see a new culture of music and clothing style taking place. It’s a hard and tough generation, where the clothes is the statement of whether you are with the cool kids or not.
The 80s is the beginning of the technological era, where movies, TV-programs and computers starts taking place and are things that the students can relate to. Even the artists such as Michael Jackson and Duran Duran have inspired our contemporary genre of music. We can also see the movie influences that come from this decade. Movies such as that Top Gun and Aliens are versions that have been re-produced and prod cast in cinemas of today. In the 90’s we have organisations such as the Greenpeace that starts to make a statement and an impact of a global change, which still is an established organisation of today. We also see a vegetarian lifestyle in this story, which has taken a great place in contemporary eating habits.

We can see an overall perspective of the cultural changes that have taken place during these six decades. Here you can see how the culture you are brought up in, or in this case the decade you are brought up in, changes your life style. In the 50s it wasn’t so much about working for organisations that thought about global warming, it was more about breaking loose from traditions that forced people to live after certain rules. The change that took place in the 50s was that people started to understand the importance of education. We can see how things have change and so the cultures. Each decade has its value and influences.
6. CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, the National Agency of Education should promote the democratic values in all materials they produce. The democratic values are a part of the intercultural education, where the focus is to educate and develop knowledge through an open communication that leads to an understanding of our cultural differences (Lgr. 11:9). Lahdenperä (2010) highlights the fact that the intercultural approach is not limited to any ethnical or national culture, but it is a combination of various influences such as religious beliefs, cultural lifestyles, gender, social classes etc. This shows how many different aspects the intercultural approach includes. This goes for the democratic concept as well, which makes it both hard and easy for the National Agency of Education to include and apply in their development of the National tests.

The problem with such a wide concept is that it’s easy to make mistakes when trying to fulfil all the aims behind the theory to accomplish the various ideas and values. To manage this, Lahdenperä (1995) claims that you must be well aware of your own, as well as of other cultural perceptions to understand their point of departure and frame of reference when discussing. This is an important principle to be aware of to not mistake or engage your personal influences or perceptions when interfering in discussions or situations. To engage your personal references could put your trustworthiness at stake (Lahdenperä, 1995:35). This means that you have to be objective as possible, which is impossible when interacting in social environments and institutions such as the school. We all are coloured by our cultural, religious or ethnical backgrounds where there are ideas that consciously or unconsciously have made an imprint on our values and beliefs. Even though the tests have been designed and cooperated by many teachers with various backgrounds, and are based on an analysis of the Swedish curriculum and on national and international research on English acquisition and proficiency (Lgr. 11:5), it has been impossible to produce a complete test that have not lacked in its production of promoting the democratic values, which also involve an intercultural perspective. Before we get in to this discussion, let’s look at how the national tests of year 2000, 2005 and 2010 have managed to include an intercultural perspective in the stories of the tests.

In year 2000 we can see that the test introduces various situations from different countries. In “Mounted Patrol” we have a story about the police in Oregon, USA where the text reveals how the horses are picked out to be a part of the police force. The standards are set after the personal character of the horse. This could be compared to how we, in our own
society, have to “fulfil standards” to be a part of a society that’s not intimidated about “the other, but rather “equipped” with the knowledge that prevents bias. This is where school and education plays a role. It could be the link to where the pupil gets a chance to encounter cultures with various values. Education gives an insight and understanding of our similarities and differences. This would, according to Bank’s model, reduce prejudice assumptions about “the other”.

In “News Around the World”, we see how different or similar our problems can be. The similarities give the student the possibility to understand and relate to the information that is conveyed, which is a feature of the intercultural model that Bank’s call “Fair education”. The dissimilarities contribute to what Bank’s call the “Empowering” feature, which involves the students increased understanding about other cultures values and behaviours. Lahdenperä (2004) claims that it is important that our future citizens aren’t alienated by the various perspectives and values that we all carry. When you have the knowledge about cultural diversities, it leads to understanding and prevents feelings of alienation. This is a way to build up respect for each other’s differences, which is a part of the intercultural process through education.

In “Surfing the Net” and “Making the Grade” the test depicts a sub-culture or a situation that the students can relate to, where you have a graffiti culture or feelings that can trigger you to strive for the “impossible”. In the National test of 2005 we have a story called “Places to Go” where we get an insight of various things that you can do when visiting the countries that are presented. We get to see a religious influence in Malta, where they talk about proper clothes when visiting their churches. We get some historical information about the colonies that the English Empire ruled over. Here we can see that Malaysia, Botswana and Barbados are some of the countries that share their historical perspective of their colonization. The stories also reveal the countries nature, climate, export and import. This is a wide combination of various subjects that are presented in one story, which is a great example of introducing and crossing cultural boarders through a text (Lorentz, 2009:43-45).

In the National test of 2010, we encounter an informative text that tells about Australia’s two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne. We get some information about their cultural places that you can visit, such as the Opera House and their various tourist guiding’s that will show you historical influences of the country. The text reveals that there are some European features left that shows their historical imprint on the country. This is something that they want tourist to take part of and they have therefore arranged tours that will take you there. They also talk about the various food cultures of the country, such as Greek, Vietnamese, Italian, and Chinese etc. The reader implicitly gets a sense of the various cultures.
that are a part of the country, which is a great way to replicate an intercultural education through a text.

In “Fireflies” we see how the American woman stops to pick up two German hitchhikers. The story shows an action of solidarity, where she shares her thought about showing empathy to people that are in need of help. She shows this by comparing the situation to her own children, where she would want someone to help them if they were in the same situation as these two German students. In Lgr. (2011:11) we can see that the curricula encourage an education that promotes an international solidarity. The text might give a sense of solidarity on a very small scale, but it is a step that could lead to an unconsciously more open attitude toward our cultural backgrounds and social situations. We can also see the multiple and various cultural influences in “Teenage Years”, where we see a chronological development of our cultural process through time. Each story that is presented, show how culture can be presented in various ways. Each decade has its own cultural perspective, where clothes, music and other cultural influences change as time changes. We can see this in the way the narrators talk about their idols and their cloths. Some of them are, after 30-40 years of fame, still pop icons and are until now known in the music era. They also talk about different subjects, where global warming and the attack on the Twin Towers are situations that contemporary generation has and are experiencing. The component that is common in all the stories is that they are told from a subjective point of view and from an English-speaking countries point of view. We get to share each decade’s lifestyle and change but there are no other countries cultural influences introduced in these six stories. The stories could have shared a situation or character from another country that have influenced their life styles. The situation that happened in the U.S. 2001, when two airplanes took down the Twin Towers, is a situation that have had a strong impact on all of us during the last decade. To end the assignment with the last story could have a negative impact if you look at it from an intercultural perspective. This event has caused a lot of suspicion towards other cultures and religions, especially in parts around the Middle East. The girl in the story ends it by saying that when this situation happened, she lost her childhood. To leave a story like this leaves too much space for interpretation of various thoughts that could be to the disadvantage of the intercultural approach.

This “mistake” could also be seen in the National tests of year 2000 and 2005. It is in “Road to Success” (2000) that the narration gets a bit more complicated. This story could be seen from a perspective where it reinforces prejudice assumptions about Zambia. The story highlights the fact that Emmanuel’s life changed drastically when he moved from The U.S. to
Zambia. His life conditions became poor and he his uncle couldn’t provide enough food for them both. Zambia is a country that has poor conditions, but that is not the problem. The problem is that Zambia is depicted as the binary opposite to America, which is what we all expect it to be. But to prevent these stereotypical depictions or assumptions, it would be an ideal occasion for the National Agency of Education to give another, an unexpected perspective of a situation of this kind. There are poor people and poor conditions in America too, where people for example, or whole families live in trailers and don’t have enough food for the day. There are also rich people and families that live in Zambia that have worked their way to get where they are. These situations might not be the norm in either of these two depicted countries, but it contradicts our prejudice assumptions about countries social situation and their cultures. In this story the reader encounters Zambia in poor conditions, but in the test of year 2005 “Writing from Africa”, the narrator describes Zambia’s beautiful nature and wild animals. The narrator of this story is an American student that goes on a school trip to Zambia. She describes the beautiful view of the Victoria Falls where she meets a local man that shows them around. The whole story gives a depiction of a culture that is inviting and friendly, which makes the reader curious about Zambia. The story gets a twist by the end, where the girl hears a woman hum on a song and she draws a conclusion of the song being a song that “her people” have sung “for who knows how many years”. This indicates that there are ideas that show a lack of knowledge about people and cultures. This can be seen in the way they convey their ideas about the African culture, where one random woman is represented as “her people”, which involves one of the largest continents in the world with its 54 countries and a population around 900 million people. This shows that the National Agency of Education have aspects that need to be reconsidered. For an institution as important as the National Agency of Education, that promotes teachers to have their point of departure in the curriculum when planning classes to avoid bias and educate democratic values, should replicate this in their own production of the national tests and avoid making generalized assumption of this kind.

The National Agency of Education has the power to convey their ideas about other cultures, which makes this even more fragile. The tests also go through a process where experienced teachers are a part of their production. This means that the tests are processed at several levels and goes through various “filters” to prevent stories of this kind to be published. Lahdenperä (1995) gives an example on how we can avoid stereotyped knowledge, where she talks about shifting roles, where people from other cultures give their perception of the Swedish culture. This will contribute to giving a perspective of ones own reality from
someone else’s perspective. This example could also be used when producing the National tests. It would be interesting to see a version where someone moves from America to Africa and gets positively surprised by the things that Zambia has to offer. Or where the story presents the historical aspects of various countries interests of Zambia’s natural sources, which have contributed to the poor conditions of the country. This might enrich the facts and associations with the country, and give the pupils a greater understanding of the countries poor conditions. It would also be interesting to see how the situation of 9/11 was experienced from a perspective of the Middle East or a story where you get various religious influences such as Muslim, Buddhist, and Atheists etc. This is how our society and many classrooms look like. The stories need to be influenced by our reality and give space to our different perspectives to understand each other. If you don’t have the knowledge or the experience of interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds, then this can be a problematic aspect from a democratic and an intercultural point of view. The stories could contribute to reinforcing alienation towards “the other”, because it could be the pupil’s first encounter with other cultures. Lahdenperä (2004) claims that the intercultural approach should balance hegemonies so that no one has the power to define or describe “the other”. This is something that is still not achieved, even after more than 30 years of experience of the National tests. We still see a hegemonic structure where one culture is more dominant than the other in the sense where it can depict its thought and values about the other culture, without taking facts into consideration.

To acknowledge our different cultures where we increase our awareness about our differences, leads to creating an environment where we can live together no matter cultural backgrounds. Teachers can use the diverse cultural perspectives to add in his/hers teaching to replicate a multicultural school that integrates and take part of each others’ cultural differences, this would then replicate an intercultural school where there are no hegemonic structures where one culture is more dominant than the other, but rather a balanced relationship where the norm of what is considered to be a “Swedish/Scandinavia” perspective is represented by the same people and cultures that sit in our Swedish classrooms that we are a part of today. Our world has become more and more globalized where various cultures influence our everyday life. These stories are a unique way to present different cultural influences. It is through them that we share and take part of different cultures where we meet and influence each other. This is why it is important to not only hear one side of the story but to give space to everyone that is included, no matter cultural background. To have an intercultural approach, involves having a democratic perspective when making the national
tests. The curriculum is formed by the National Agency of Education where they set the goal that the pupils should have achieved in compulsory school. This governmental institution has to put together a National test that approximately involves 8 pages about various subjects and cultures. Not one of these tests have managed to fulfil the standards of an intercultural approach or live up to the democratic values that are promoted in the curriculum. The National Agency of Education set goals that they themselves cannot fulfil. To know whether or not the pupils have managed to achieve the knowledge that the intercultural concept carries is hard to measure. The fact that the pupils are introduced to texts in the National tests of English, that are not replicating an intercultural approach, makes it harder for them to achieve the attitudes that the concept promotes. It is hard for a culture that is too involved in the attitudes that it is surrounded by to create goals and knowledge about interculturality when it has no contrasts or measurements to its own “reality”. With other words, there are no contrasts that could entail in the process of accomplishing the knowledge that the pupils have to achieve, since the producers have the same perspective and values as the pupils. This means that there is a hegemonic structure that is static, since there are no other cultural influences or exchange of thoughts that involves in the production of the tests. There is also a lack of common platform of what the intercultural concept involves. This means that the intercultural approach is a concept that could be interpreted in various ways, depending on cultural background and perspectives. This means that the people that establish the goals and produce the tests hold the power in their hand of what they want to replicate in the national tests. There is with other words hegemonic culture that decides what to involve or not involve in the national tests of English. The tests reinforce this by showing how they decide to replicate an African woman and a song that she hums on (National Test of year 2010). One can also see this in the way they depict Zambia in a binary opposite to America, where the Emanuel who is the main character in the text, encounters the poor conditions that Emanuel of Zambia (National Test of year 2005). This also shown in how the American girl in test 2010 depicts her memories of the incident that took place in year 2001 called 9/11.

Another thing that needs to be pointed out is that the stories that presents other cultures are always told from a third person’s perspective, which means that you never get to know what the character that is presented is thinking. It is only an English speaking, or a Western point of view that has a first person’s perspective and gets a chance to share their thoughts about the cultures and characters that he/she encounters. This is another aspect that proves that there is a hegemonic structure that influences thoughts and values about various cultures. Lahdenperä emphasized the importance of the intercultural approach which should balance
hegemonies so that no one has he power to define or describe the “other” culture or ethnicity (2004:27). This goal is also promoted in the curriculum (Lgr 11: 9). Despite the fact that the National Agency of Education has stated these goals, they have not managed to fulfil their own standards. The argument and the conclusion of this research is that it is too poor knowledge and cultural influences that could interact and involve in the texts that are produced. There is a subtle Western norm that permeates in the production of the national tests that prions the learners in the Western norm. The national tests are a replication of the dominant hegemony of the country. The idea with the intercultural approach and the democratic values is to balance the hegemonies, but the national tests are instead reinforcing the powerful hegemonies that exist in the Western culture. This is shown in all three test, where one hegemonic culture has the powerful position of replicating its thoughts and beliefs about other cultures, which makes the national tests lack of an intercultural approach and democratic values that the tests should be based upon. There has not been a development in the intercultural approach during the last decade. Maybe the new Swedish generation that today sits in our multicultural classrooms can make a change in the hegemonic structures that exist in the Western culture. In that case, it will take another decade or two to see a National Test that replicates an intercultural and democratic approach.
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7. APPENDIX

The National Test of 2000

Task (1): The Mounted Patrol
This story is about the mounted police in Portland, Oregon, USA. The students are supposed to use the information in the text to fill in the right answers in the brackets that are empty in the text. The text gives information about the horses the police unit uses in their force. You get to know the name of the oldest horse they use, where you can find the barn where they keep the horses, what working-hours the horses have, what age the horses begin and stop working for the police unit, what you are allowed to do if you want to come and visit the barn, what kind of food they eat to keep the horses in shape, what kind of material the horseshoes are made of, how often they change the shoes and the weight of the horses.

Task (2): News around the World
In this task there are seven small paper clippings about news from different parts of the world. There are twelve statements that the students are supposed to match with these newspaper clippings.

- Unemployment up
This story is about the increasing number of unemployed in Hallbridge. This is city is in either Canada or England. The text reveals that most of the unemployed were people who dropped out of school.

- Sailboard Blockade
These news are about seven anti-nuclear demonstrators that prevented of a ship from sailing into Brisbane, Australia on a good-will visit. The demonstrators were arrested for this action, but were later that day released after the ship had sailed back.

- School to Pay Kids
A school in Mayfield is offering 16-year old students £100 each to encourage them to take A-levels. The Government pays schools £2.500 for every sixth graduated student. A nearby school called Highland College gives £1.200 to students with the best exam results. A teacher in one of these schools claims that the Government has forced schools into this kind of competition. The text doesn’t reveal what country the news are from but Mayfield could be stated in Australia, Wales, Canada, USA, England or New Zealand.

- Survivors Sought
In this newspaper clipping they tell about an air and sea search for possible survivors after a British catamaran, which was found, capsized on the west coast of Spain. The catamaran was supposed to sail from Wales to Africa.

- Drop-Out Danger
These news are about 200 students in Kuria, Kenya who must drop out of school because of their economic situation, which makes it hard to pay the school fees. But an education project called World Vision, has managed to collect enough money to pay the fees until the end of this year. The manager of the school claims that if it weren’t for World Vision, the students would definitely have to drop out of school.
• Ferry Withdrawn
This story is about a ferry in Kenya that withdrew from its service due to a vessel that broke down and caused a traffic jam that lasted for hours. This prevented the traffic to precede its initial destinations.

• Walk-Out Talks
These news are about 400 men who protested against their working conditions and wages at a fabrication in Wallsend. This initiated a negotiation between the manager and the workers that hopefully will improve the employees work condition. Wallsend is a city in either England or Australia.

Task 3: Surfing the Net
In this exercise the students are to read four articles from an on-line edition of different newspapers. After reading the articles they are suppose to fill in the correct answer to twelve different statements that are made. In each statement they have four options where only one is the correct answer.

Graffiti
These news are about a church in New Zealand, Papanui where an artist called Lucas Kelly has displayed a graffiti art on a wall of a placed called the Warehouse, which is a part of a High School. Lucas is a member of a notorious graffiti group that goes under pseudonyms such as Teltt, Tonka, Lokash, Nerve and Havik and they are known and famous in the culture of graffiti. They use to tag bus stops, train stations, alley ways and schools around Papanui, but now they are learning to be graphic artists where the main focus is on colours and patterns.

Task 4: Making the Grade
This story is about a boy called Juan Duran who comes from Venezuela and moves to live in the United States. He realizes that moving to another country has its positive and negative sides. He feels isolated by the language barrier that keeps him separated from his peers. After only three days in school, his teacher announced that he was incapable to learn English. The nine-year-old boy refuses to accept his teacher’s verdict and decides to start reading children's books in the public library. He slowly works himself up to the adult section and to his favourite author, Stephen King. Juan’s determination pays off. He is now a senior at JFK High School in Silver Spring, where he has passed advanced-placement English and made the honour roll. He is also leading the tutoring program to help Latino students to get started with the English language. The teaching sessions in English has now a waiting list and is a successful business for Juan. Monica Lopez, who is a high school sophomore, claims that students like Juan inspire other students to beat obstacles that comes their way.

Task 5: Road to Success
This story begins with a proverb that says, "Necessity is the mother of invention". The story is about a man who grew up in the United States but originally comes from Zambia. His life changed "drastically" when his parents got divorced because he went to live with his uncle in north of Zambia. This place is described as a rural outpost with poor conditions where his uncle cannot afford to put enough food on the table for them both. That is why Emmanuel, which is the boy’s name, decides to help his uncle out. He teaches himself to fish and hunt to supplement the food his uncle provides. He works out an irrigation system where he trapped water from a nearby stream. This enables him to grow vegetables that he starts selling on a market near his uncle’s house. This experience gives Emmanuel a sense of invention which leads him to a numerous of projects. Today he is the
owner of KBM Computer Learning Centre, which offers courses in computer science. Emmanuel claims that if it were not for the necessity, this success would not have happened.

The National Test of 2005

Task 1: Places to Go

The national test of English in year 2005 starts with some tourist information about four different countries. The four countries are Malta, Malaysia, Botswana and Barbados where the information is presented along with their flags. The students are supposed to find some facts in the text and write authentic answers to the eight questions that are asked. The questions are:

1. Which country is inhabited by most people?
2. What is special about the weather in Barbados in September?
3. Which two countries offers special prices for visiting interesting places?
4. Explain what Britain has to do with the history of these four countries?
5. What different local specialties you recommended to taste?
6. Name two things that are produced in Malaysia.
7. What three animals are mentioned in the texts?
8. In which of the texts can you read about…
   - serious crime?  - dangerous driving?
   - traditional music?  - not being dressed in a certain colour?
   - a very dry climate?  - provoking people by the way you dress?

Task 2: Talking About Things

The second task consists of a coherent authentic narration, where the students are supposed to add words that are missing in the text away (one word per space). This assignment tests the students' ability to understand the context, where they show their vocabulary skills of words and phrases and their formal correctness. Sometimes these are more than one possible answer. Grammatical accuracy is required to get points and for any eventual typos that are made, there is a reduction of points, which is up to three points per sentence (three words).

There is a picture along with the text, where you see four teenagers having a discussion. There are no names mentioned when presenting the questions, so you do not know who asks what, and who answers what. Two of these teenagers have the appearance of African American, while two of them have a Western appearance. You know that they are African American since the text reveals the subjects they are talking about. Their discussion is about how they can improve the relation in the group. One of them answers this by saying that they should start by treating each (the missing word in the sentence) other with respect. One asks if they have time for a quick coffee before they leave? The answer to that is that it depends (the missing word in the sentence) on Bruno, if he can drive them to the station. One asks how long they’ve known Naomi? One answers by saying, at least (the missing word in the sentence) fifteen years. One asks about the voting (the missing word in the sentence) at the last American presidential election? One answers that it was a close race, but in the end George W. Bush won. One asks if you have to show your passport when crossing the border between Mexico and the US? One answers, yes, they think so.
Task 3: Writing from Africa

The task requires the students to answer questions either by selecting the correct answer choice or by formulating their own answers. On some issues, there are more than one answer or information that is requested, which will be shown by the formulation of the question.

The story is about an American girl who depicts herself as a typical “I know everything” teen who longs to get away from her loneliness and uncertainty. She tells about her stages in life where she played the stereotypical high school student that wears the coolest clothes, goes to dances, football games and parties. But in the end she realized that she didn’t belong to any of these so-called stages. She decides to meet new challenges and end up going on a school trip to Africa when she is 16 years old, together with random teachers and students. The impressions started as soon as on the first day of the trip, where she saw a leopard running down an impala. She saw how the leopard enjoyed his prey. She tells about her teacher Dave that decides to have a biological lesson in the middle of it all, because he wanted to take the chance to dissect an animal, that they never would have gotten if they weren’t in Africa. She gets to see some exotic place such as the Victoria Falls and the jungle. In the jungle they meet a man in army overalls and machine gun. He demanded to know who they were and where they were going. When he found out that they were a group of tourists, he became friendlier and showed them around. He showed them places that only are familiar to the local people. He told them to pay attention to anything that looks like a big log; it might be a crocodile coming towards them. Their guide decides to jump into the falls, which ends up with the group following him. They travelled around in Africa by train for two months. Their last stop was in Zambia, which is where they hear a humming song when they are about to go to sleep. She describes the occasion in the following way:

Later when I was half asleep I could hear Jesse and Kelly talking and another voice humming.
The voice belonged to an African woman who was singing a haunting, magical song - perhaps a song her people have sung for who-knows-how-many years. It was then it hit me - there are so many different cultures in the world, and I’ve come in contact with maybe 3% of them.

The National Test of 2010

Task 1: Melbourne

In this part we see a folio that gives the information about Melbourne, which is the second largest city in Australia. The text has a print of a brochure that shows what tourists can do when they visit the city and assures you that after doing the tour, the city will grow on you. It explains that Sidney is a very nice place to visit and to live in because of its subtle charm and natural settings or “in-your-face” sights, such as the Opera House. It also tells about the Heritage Walk, which is a self-guiding tour in the city that takes you to all surrounding areas. They also give information about the “Another View”, which gives you a glimpse of Melbourne’s pre-European history that takes place on seventeen-sites walking trail. The brochure shows the opening hours of the places that are presented. It also shows nice places where you can have a nice meals or evening drinks for cheap money. Here it gives examples of Greek café’s, Chinese food in Chinatown, Italian restaurants and Vietnamese places, which are the dominating genre of food on Victoria Street. Most Melbourne restaurants are BYO, which means that you are allowed to bring your own drink. After reading these facts about cities in Australia, the students are supposed to answer ten different questions about the text.
**Task 2: Fireflies**

In this exercise the students are supposed to fill in 19 words that are missing in the text. There is supposed to be one word per space. This exercise will show the students' ability to understand the context, where they show their vocabulary skills of words and phrases and their formal accuracy. There is more than one possible answer, but the student can only get one point for each sentence. Grammatical accuracy is required to get points.

This story is told by an American woman and is from a subjective point of view. It is about how she one day meets two young German hitchhikers. They hold up a sign that makes her stop and pick them up, which she normally never would do. The sign said “German students to any beach”. First it said Virginia Beach, but they had crossed Virginia and written “any”, which made her feel bad for them, which is the reason to why she stopped. She thought about her own children and how she would want someone to help them if they were in the same situation. Initially she was thinking about just driving them to a beach close to her home, but during the trip she starts bonding with them. They tell her that they were exchange-students from Oregon and that they were making their way across the country to meet some high school friends. She realizes that they are two pleasant young men and decides to invite them to stay at her place, instead of sleeping on the beach. She offers them a shower and invites them to the beach for a big meal by the fire. As they were roasting marshmallows, they saw beautiful small fireflies appearing as the night settled in. This was something that the two German students never had encountered before. The woman is so proud of the little flies and she joyfully says that she can’t explain the mystery of the tiny little beetle, but that they always bring her unexpected joy. The boys get to stay over and they spend the night talking and joking. The students continue writing to her to tell about their travels and their lives back at home. She ends the story by saying how she feels each time she receives a letter from them, which is that: “…the letters reminds me of a beautiful night under the stars when strangers became friends.”

**Task 3: Teenage Years**

In this section, the assignment has its point of departure in some articles from various papers and some Internet sights. The text is divided in five different short stories that present some of the most famous artists of that decade. For each story, the students either have to fill in the correct answer, or write the right answer to get points. In some of these questions, the student has to interpret, draw conclusions or explain with own words to get the correct answer.

- **The 60s**

The second story is about Sheila Harvey 55 years old from London. She tells about her teenage years in the 60s, especially the summer of 1968, which was the hippie era. She listened to the Beatles and the Stones and read *The Lord of the Rings*. Her parents did not approve of her lifestyle because they were small town people. When she was 17, she managed to persuade her parents of moving to London. London was like paradise to her where she could walk barefooted on the streets with her grandmother’s silk tablecloth as a coat, without people looking at her strangely. This was a way of signalling to other hippies that she was part of the counter culture. People that were dressed in the same way soon became friends. She ends the story by saying: there was no AIDS, money was not the god of consumer society it has become now and gun crime was non-existing. We were free to experiment with life and ideas – and that, I believe, is really what all teenagers needs.”
- **The 70s**

The third story is about Andy Newland, 45, from Kent. He tells about how the peace and love era was substituted with the hard and tough times of the 70s. The heroes of that time were teens that desperately tried for the “the CID* look”, which was a teenage outfit. The outfit was a beaten up leather jacket, flared jeans and an undone shirt to the navel. If you did not smoke and listen to superstars such as David Bowie and Marc Bolan you were not with the cool kids.

- **The 80s**

The fourth story is about Nelson Little born 1969 in Michigan. He grew up as a teenager in the 80s. He remembers the Muppets show, playing on his Atari PlayStation, riding his ten-speed bike and rolling around in the neighbourhood with his roller skates. He listened to Madonna, Neil Diamond, Michel Jackson and Duran Duran on MTV or on his Walkman. On the weekend he would go to the movies with his brother. Their favourite movies were *Top Gun, Back to the Future and Aliens*. He also was the first generation to use the PC in school, watch videos and listen to CDs.

- **The 90s**

The fifth story is about Erin Shaw 30 years from North London. She grew up as a teenager in the 90s and says that she hated the egoism of the 80s, which ended up with her changes lifestyle and becoming a vegetarian. She became a member of Greenpeace and refused using products that were animal tested. She was more concerned about the greenhouse effect rather than the global warming. She begged her friends and family to use ozone friendly products such as hairsprays and deodorant aerosols that destroyed the atmosphere. House music was the dominant genre of music culture. Even though she wore neon clothes with big smiley faces on, her mother wouldn’t let her go to the rave parties. She also listened to live music and indie bands and she was a big fan of Nirvana. She calls the 90s the decade of optimism.

- **The 00s**

The sixth story is about Anna Wieldly 23 from Los Angeles. She remembers how she was cheering at the new millennium with her friends and their plastic glasses. The teenagers of the new century were called the “Double Zeros” She says that when the Twin Towers collapsed, their self-centred innocence ended, where their childhood went down with the towers. She continues by saying that suddenly there was more to life than just smoking behind the bike shed.