Language and Culture

A Study about the Relationship between Postcolonial Literature and Intercultural Competence in the EFL Classroom
Filip Svensson

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain to what extent English teachers at the upper secondary level in Sweden use postcolonial literature in their teaching and in that case if it is used in order to teach intercultural competence. The reason for this was the claim that there is a strong connection between postcolonial literature and intercultural competence as well as between postcolonial literature and the curriculum for the upper secondary school, and specifically the English courses. The primary material used was gathered through interviews involving teachers working at an upper secondary school in the southern part of Kronobergs Län. Three out of five interviewees did use postcolonial literature and the main reason was that it provides a platform for students to learn about different cultures and societies in areas in the world where English is used. It also turned out that certain authors were used more frequently than others, namely J.M. Coetzee, Chinua Achebe and Doris Lessing.

The theoretical basis for this essay has been the notion of intercultural competence, especially linked with language teaching. Developing intercultural competence provides students with the possibility of gaining increased understanding of different cultures, something that seems to be immensely important in a Swedish school system where the classrooms are becoming more and more multicultural. It is argued here that postcolonial literature lends itself particularly well when it comes to the combination of language- and culture didactics and teachers’ responses in the interviews have given reason to believe that this is in fact so.

Keywords: Postcolonial literature, intercultural competence, the EFL Classroom
# Contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

2. Previous Research ................................................................................................................ 3

3. Theoretical Foundation ......................................................................................................... 5
   3.1. Intercultural Competence in the EFL Classroom ......................................................... 5
   3.2. Postcolonial Literature ................................................................................................. 8
   3.3. Intercultural Competence and Postcolonial Literature ............................................. 11
       3.3.1. *My Place* ............................................................................................................ 11
       3.3.2. *My Place* and Intercultural Competence ....................................................... 12
   3.4. Intercultural Competence and Postcolonial Literature from a Curriculum Perspective .......................................................... 15
       3.4.1. The Curriculum .................................................................................................... 15
       3.4.2. The English Courses .......................................................................................... 17

4. Method and Material ............................................................................................................ 19
   4.1. Method .......................................................................................................................... 19
   4.2. Discussion on Limitations, Ethics and Epistemology ............................................... 20
   4.3. Material ....................................................................................................................... 22

5. Analysis and Discussion ....................................................................................................... 22
   5.1. Intercultural Competence and Postcolonial Literature in the EFL Classroom ............. 22
5.2. Why Nor? ........................................................................................................ 29
  5.2.1 Ability ........................................................................................................... 29
  5.2.2. Availability ................................................................................................. 32
  5.3. Preferred Literature ...................................................................................... 35

6. Summary and Conclusion .................................................................................. 37

Works cited .............................................................................................................. I

Appendix ................................................................................................................... VII
1. Introduction

The embryo of the following study has its origin in my reading postcolonial literature as part of my English studies. Personally, it was the first time I experienced a bridge between the dichotomy of language and culture, which Claire Kramsch claims is “an entrenched feature in language teaching around the world” (1993 8). Those texts, then, truly spawned my own interest in analysing literature and served as inspiration when I attempted to introduce postcolonial literature to students at the upper secondary level during my student-teacher placements in 2013 and 2014 as well as while working as a teacher at the upper secondary level in 2014.

As I had never faced postcolonial literature during my own language studies at the upper secondary level, the aforementioned realisation caused me to reflect on the possibilities of utilising postcolonial literature in the EFL classroom. Coincidentally, while at the teacher education programme at the Linnaeus University, I came across Michael Byram’s writings on intercultural competence. At its core, intercultural competence regards an individual’s ability to “accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world” (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 5). Also, Byram views the classroom as one of three possible fora in which intercultural competence can be acquired (1997 65), and as English enables “non-native speakers to gain access to a globalised world of communication and to overcome barriers of language and culture” (Kohn 71), the EFL classroom lends itself particularly well to the purpose of this study. As Byram and Karen Risager put it, “teaching of linguistic awareness is also teaching of cultural awareness” (153). The main concern of this degree project is to ascertain to what extent, if any at all, teachers of English at the upper secondary level in Sweden use postcolonial literature as part of their course material and if reasons behind this use can be linked to teaching intercultural competence.
Following this introductory section it is of importance to recognise previous research in the specific field of study which this essay is part of and how this degree project attempts to highlight new perspectives or complement the existing studies. Most importantly the dissertations by Ulrika Tornberg (2000), Ulla Lundgren (2002), Eva Gagnestam (2003), Anna Greek (2008) and Anna Thyberg (2012) will be discussed.

Subsequently, the theoretical foundation is discussed, the basis of which is Byram’s discussion of aspects of intercultural competence. In addition, the contributions by for example Claire Kramsch and Hans Lorentz to the studies on language and culture are utilised. In the theory section I attempt to contextualise intercultural competence in relation to postcolonial literature by using Sally Morgan’s *My Place* as a concrete example, and also tie postcolonial literature to the curriculum for the upper secondary level as well as the English courses in particular.

Subsequently, the method and material are presented more thoroughly. This thesis is based on qualitative interviews and therefore the primary material consists of the interviews performed for this study with teachers of English at the upper secondary level. In this subsection a discussion on limitations, ethics and epistemological concerns will be presented as well. Secondary material is also discussed briefly.

The penultimate section offers an analysis of the primary material with reference to the theoretical foundation of the study – the responses from the interviewees will be discussed in relation to intercultural competence. Lastly, in the final section a summary of the study and a conclusion based on the results is given.

The overall aim of this thesis, then, is to explore what role using postcolonial literature in the EFL classroom can have when it comes to teaching intercultural competence specifically, and how postcolonial literature and intercultural competence can be linked to the curriculum. The aim is also to determine if teachers of English at the upper secondary level
use postcolonial literature as a means of combining language and culture. Most importantly, the reasons why teachers do or do not use postcolonial literature are discussed in relation to intercultural competence. Moreover, this study strives to establish which texts or authors are utilised and why teachers prefer these particular texts or authors.

2. Previous Research

To begin with, there are quite a few current academic essays dealing with interculturality and postcolonialism in the classroom — especially when it comes the previously mentioned possibility of combining the teaching of English with more abstract critical thinking regarding multiculturalism. For example, in *Intercultural Communicative Competence: Exploring English Language Teachers' Beliefs and Practices*, Tony Johnstone Young and Itesh Sachdev have done interviews with teachers from the US, the UK and France regarding their stance on the matter of exploring different cultures with their students. In addition, *The Postcolonial Student: Learning the Ethics of Global Solidarity in an English Classroom*, written by Masood Ashraf Raja, deals with a similar problematizing in the UK. A common denominator separating these texts from this study is that they scrutinise the critical tool of postcolonialism in general rather than postcolonial literature specifically. I.e. while these authors discuss the value of postcolonialism as a theory in itself, this essay strives to show how this particular body of literature can serve as a means of adhering both to the specific English courses in Sweden as well as the overall aims of the Swedish school when it comes to building the foundation for future citizens of a world in which the idea of clear borders of nation states is diminishing.

Narrowing the scope and focusing on Sweden, several dissertations have been written on the possibilities of the EFL Classroom as a platform for combining language studies and
cultural studies. For example, Eva Gagnestam has done research on the benefits of intercultural competence in *Kultur i språkundervisning – med fokus på engelska*. In this dissertation from 2003, Gagnestam examines the existence of cultural studies within language teaching in Sweden and in this case specifically within the English subject. Among other things, she has interviewed future English teachers for the upper secondary level about what they remember being taught about other cultures when they themselves studied English at the upper secondary level, as well as whether there is more focus on cultural studies when it comes to language teaching at the university level. Where Gagnestam’s study focuses more on the role of culture in language teaching in general, this essay complements this with a strong focus on postcolonial literature and intercultural competence specifically.

In *Interkulturell förståelse i engelskundervisning – en möjlighet* from 2002, Ulla Lundgren has also interviewed teachers of English in Sweden about their views on incorporating cultural studies in their teaching and using different cultures to improve learning. Most importantly, though, she presents her theories on the value of integrating the study of various cultures with more traditional language studies. The aim is to give students the possibility of developing intercultural competence. Lundgren has interviewed teachers in year seven through year nine, not teachers at the upper secondary level, and this is one perspective from which the current study can contribute.

More recent dissertations within this research area include Anna Thyberg’s *Ambiguity and Estrangement: Peer-Led Deliberative Dialogues on Literature in the EFL Classroom* published in 2012, and Anna Greek’s *Reading Cultural Encounter* published in 2008. Thyberg’s dissertation focuses on to what extent learners of English formulate and negotiate fundamental values while discussing literature within a deliberative context. She has utilised postcolonial theory as the basis of this research and lists a plethora of positive effects on the students when it comes to widening their perspectives and perceptions of the world (315-320).
However, Thyberg has not included the view of teachers, which is where the current study hopefully complements her results.

In *Reading Cultural Encounter*, Anna Greek offers inspiration to EFL teachers when it comes to analysing literature and exemplifies her framework with postcolonial texts. She states that English, in its role as lingua franca, “is a vehicle of a vast number of cultures” (37), and furthermore that the language classroom and literary text can become a possible platform for “multivocal signification” (43), which means that several ways of making sense of the world come together. She has not included practical applications of the framework nor any interviews with teachers or students, and this is one aspect where this study can serve as a complement.

Another seminal contribution regarding the combination of culture and language in the Swedish EFL classroom is Ulrika Tornberg’s *Om språkundervisning i mellanrummet – och talet om “kommunikation” och “kultur” i kursplaner och läromedel från 1962 till 2000* published in 2000. Tornberg examines how culture is viewed in Swedish curricula and course material historically and argues, among many things, that the EFL classroom offers an opportunity for intercultural competence, and that it could serve as a democratic meeting point. Certainly, Tornberg’s dissertation is a natural point of reference for the current study.

It is perhaps important to point out that only Thyberg’s dissertation was published after the introduction of the new curriculum in Sweden, *Lgr11*, and from that perspective this study aims to complement the previous research mentioned here.
3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1 Intercultural Competence in the EFL Classroom

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on Byram’s criteria for intercultural competence. At the very core, teaching intercultural competence in the EFL classroom is about creating the opportunity for intercultural understanding and empathy within the context of foreign language learning (Byram and Hu). This means that knowledge and understanding of different cultures are set as an important part of the study of a language, in this case English. This interdisciplinary view is shared by for example Karen Risager (2006; 2007) and Geneviève Zarate (1993), although Risager aims to develop the idea of intercultural communicative competence even further (2007 224-225). The connections I claim exist between intercultural competence and postcolonial literature as well as the curriculum for the upper secondary level and the English courses specifically will be discussed in sections 2.3 and 2.4.

In *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, the concept of intercultural competence is defined. Byram points to five factors, which all include the learner being able to understand a different culture. In essence, “the components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds“ (Byram, et al. 5). The knowledge aspect of intercultural competence does not necessarily concern knowledge about a specific culture but rather understanding of the intricacies of social identities and social groups in both the learner’s own culture and the target culture (Byram 35). Claire Kramsch also recognises the necessity of looking beyond simple “transmission of information” about another culture (1993 205). In “*Språkdidaktik för ett föränderligt samhälle*” this argument is expressed by Liselott Forsman, Mikaela Björklund
and Kai Sjöholm as well (Forsman, et al. 235). Regarding skills this factor is twofold. The skills are defined here firstly as the skill to interpret a document or an event from another culture, and to be able to relate this to one’s own culture, and secondly the skill to attain new knowledge of a culture and how it functions (Byram 37-38). Intercultural attitudes are defined as curiosity and openness about another culture and this entails the disregard of suspicion of different cultures, accepting that one’s own culture is not the only viable one and the willingness to put oneself in the perspective of another person (34-35). Finally, critical awareness of oneself and one’s values is needed since “values and behaviours are deeply embedded” (Byram, et al. 7).

As mentioned in the introduction, Kramsch points to an evident dichotomy of language and culture in language classrooms worldwide. However, Kramsch states that teaching culture cannot be separated from teaching language (1993 8-9), and she views the language classroom as a platform on which cultural stereotypes “conditioned by our own culture” can be challenged (1998 67-68). In Edward Said’s Orientalism the author expresses the need to bridge the gap of this dichotomy, and Said’s argument is that “society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together” (27). Kramsch’s hope for the role of the classroom is perhaps an especially poignant notion now that Europe and the world see a resurgence of right-wing extremist parties – even in Sweden. In Interkulturell pedagogisk kompetens, for example, Hans Lorentz establishes that there is a relatively high level of xenophobia and concealed racism in Swedish schools and that the rightist party Sverigedemokraterna has rapidly become one of the top four parties in School elections (48-49). Providing a chance for students to discuss and analyse issues such as racism and cultural diversity while at the same time studying English, then, could possibly offer a forum where light could be shed on these issues. Accordingly, Lorentz argues that there is a connection between xenophobia in Swedish schools and lack of intercultural competence expressed in steering documents (89).
Placing intercultural competence in the context of the Swedish school, in *Interkulturell förståelse i engelskundervisning – en möjlighet*, Ulla Lundgren views the teaching of intercultural competence as a combination of language- and culture didactics (17), and links it directly to teaching English in Swedish schools. Moreover, to Lundgren language teaching is first and foremost “a matter of democracy” (13), and intercultural competence with its mix of language- and culture didactics hence encompasses both the subject-specific didactics as well as the more comprehensive problematisation of general didactics (34). Lorentz also discusses the value of intercultural competence in language teaching and especially the role of teachers as “cultural carriers” (82). The teacher’s intercultural competence is emphasised further by Pirjo Lahdenperä and Margareta Sandström who propose that teachers’ ability to empathise is vital in an increasingly multi-ethnic classroom, and also suggest that fiction could be a suitable tool for teaching intercultural competence (106-107). Hence, language teaching can be a basis for fostering democratic citizens, for critical analysis, looking at human rights and conflict solving (Lundgren 34), which in the end is strongly linked to the fundamental values expressed in the curriculum for the upper secondary school.

3.2 Postcolonial Literature

The term “postcolonial” can be defined in a myriad of different ways, depending on the perspective one takes. Therefore, it is vital to define what is referred to as postcolonial within the confines of this study. In *The Empire Writes Back – Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin use the term “to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). These authors discuss both postcolonial theory and postcolonial literature and thus the distinction between the two is discussed here.
Deriving from the Subaltern Studies of Gayatri Spivak and perhaps even more so from Said’s *Orientalism*, postcolonial theory has its origins in the late 1970s and the early ‘80s (Gandhi 3,25). Today, it is included with numerous other interdisciplinary fields of study such as gender, feminism, ecocriticism and queer-theory, to name a few, under the category of cultural studies. In *Postcolonialism – Theory, Practice or Process?* Ato Quayson defines postcolonialism as follows:

[I]t involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies as well as at the level of more global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire. Postcolonialism often also involves the discussion of experiences of various kinds, such as those of slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender, place, and the responses of the discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. (2)

Literary fictional works by postcolonial authors, however, date back much further than that, but are in turn often used as material within postcolonial studies. Notable postcolonial authors writing in English include Nobel Prize winners in literature such as Doris Lessing (born in Pakistan), J.M. Coetzee (South Africa), V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad) and Wole Soyinka (Nigeria), and today some of the more prominent postcolonial writers are Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, Margaret Atwood from Canada as well as Amitav Ghosh and Anita Desai from India, just to mention a few. These writers, then, are often linked to postcolonial studies.

Furthermore, Ashcroft, et al. write that their book is “concerned with writing by those peoples formerly colonized by Britain” (1), which is also the case for the present study. In the book they characterise what constitutes postcolonial literature. They bring up hegemony as a
key element, and state that postcolonial authors deal with the “imperial experience” and that they “write back to a centre” – the former colonisers (6). Ashcroft, et al. also mention the language aspect of postcolonial literature and claim that “[l]anguage becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated” and that “[s]uch power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice” (7). In the subsequent section, the characteristics of postcolonial literature mentioned here will be discussed in connection to a specific text – Sally Morgan’s My Place. In addition, in The Empire Writes Back, the authors write that “crisis of identity” has a special place in postcolonial literature (9). The matter of crisis of identity will be particularly evident while discussing My Place. Equally important, and the matter of “displacement” is also a major concern in postcolonial literature. Displacement stems from the difficulty with connecting a self to a place. This could pertain to not being able to identify with a place emotionally, as well as physically being dislocated from a place, for example through “migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour” (9). This physical dislocation will be discussed in relation to My Place presently.

In the article “Post-colonial Theory”, Jonathan Hart and Terry Goldie also describe what type of literature is often regarded as postcolonial. When it comes to postcolonial literature written in English the examples brought up suggest that the majority of the texts come from the former colonies of the British Empire. However, Hart and Goldie point out that for example Ireland, Canada and the US are very rarely seen as former colonies (156), although Margaret Atwood is a one example of an author whose work is considered by some as postcolonial even though she is Canadian.

The above-mentioned definition of postcolonial literature, texts written in English by authors from the former British colonies, is used throughout this thesis.
3.3 Intercultural Competence and Postcolonial Literature

3.3.1 *My Place*

To further clarify the connection I claim exists between teaching intercultural competence and using postcolonial literature in the EFL classroom, I introduce a postcolonial text I have studied as a student of English, as well as used in my own teaching, as a concrete example of how postcolonial literature can be connected to intercultural competence. In the following section, said text is discussed in relation to Byram’s model for intercultural competence, but first a brief presentation of the text is given here.

*My Place* by Sally Morgan (b. 1951) is a biographical chronicle of her life, and it reveals her discovery of Aboriginality in her heritage. Until age 15, Morgan was unaware of the fact that she was Aboriginal and she and her siblings were encouraged by their mother and grandmother to tell other children at school they were Indian. This evident struggle with identifying a self rather explicitly pertains to what Ashcroft, et al. refer to as “crisis of identity” (9). After the discovery of her true heritage, she digs deeper and decides to write a book about it. She interviews her mother, her grandmother and her great uncle.

Through this research, Sally sets out to learn about her family history. While interviewing her family members she discovers that they had been part of a removal process in Australia. This meant that some indigenous children were removed from their families to be raised in missions run by white, Anglo-Saxon people imposing their Christian values on the Aboriginals. This part of her and her relatives’ past is characteristic of what is mentioned as one of the main elements of postcolonial literature in *The Empire Writes Back*, namely the aforementioned “displacement”. Sally’s great uncle Arthur, her mother Gladys and her
grandmother Daisy were all subject to this removal process and thus also subject to displacement.

### 3.3.2 My Place and Intercultural Competence

The knowledge aspect of intercultural competence concerns the understanding of the intricacies of social identities and social groups. In My Place, the reader is certainly faced with this as Morgan confronts her past and that of her relatives. Firstly, in the initial chapters of My Place, Morgan shares her experiences of the different socioeconomic strata. For example, the strata are highlighted through the varying quality of the children’s school lunches:

Children from Como always had totally different lunches to children from Manning. They had pieces of salad, chopped up and sealed in plastic containers. Their cake was wrapped neatly in grease-proof paper, and they had real cordial in a proper flask. There was a kid in our class whose parents were so wealthy that they gave him bacon sandwiches for lunch. By contrast, kids from Manning drank from the water fountain and carried sticky jam sandwiches in brown paper bags. (37)

This excerpt provides an insight into Sally’s everyday struggles with social identity and into how children could be made aware of their different backgrounds through a simple packed lunch.

As previously mentioned, the text also deals with ethnic and cultural identity. This is highlighted most acutely when other school children begin to ask Sally and her siblings about
When Sally asks her mother and grandmother regarding this they tell her to “[t]ell them you’re Indian” (38), and Sally is content with finally having an answer to give as the other children “could quite believe we were Indian” since “they just didn’t want us pretending we were Aussies when we weren’t” (39).

Furthermore, through the stories of Sally’s relatives, the reader is faced with generations of struggles with cultural identity. Her great uncle, Arthur, reveals how he was beaten and only allowed to speak English at the station where he was forced to work (178), and that he remembers “seein’ native people all chained up around the neck and hands, walkin’ behind a policeman“ as well as hearing about “white men goin’ shooting blackfellas for sport” (181). Arthur’s story ends with a striking perspective on Australia:

> Take the white people in Australia, they brought the religion here with them and the Commandment, Thou Shalt Not Steal, and yet they stole this country. They took from the innocent … I want my story finished. I want everyone to read it … You see, it’s important, because then maybe they’ll understand how hard it’s been for the blackfella to live the way he wants. (213)

The quote above highlights the way in which postcolonial literature offers a forum for the understanding of different identities and the vast complexity behind how different people view the world.

When it comes to the skills required for intercultural competence, the learner should be able to interpret a document or an event from another culture in relation to his or her own culture, and know how to attain new knowledge of a culture and how it functions. The removal process in Australia could certainly qualify as such an event, and throughout My Place there is a plethora of passages with which an EFL student could put his or her own
culture into perspective. For example, in the following quote Sally ponders how her view on family differs from her classmates’:

All of my class-mates had their own beds, some of them even had their own rooms. I considered them disadvantaged. I couldn’t explain the happy feeling of warm security I felt when we all snuggled in together. Also, I found some of their attitudes to their brothers and sisters hard to understand. They didn’t seem to really like one another … We were just the opposite … We felt our family was the most important thing in the world. (38)

Regarding the removal process, Sally’s mother, Gladys, recalls being taken from her mother at the age of three or four and being put in a children’s home, and vividly describes her experiences of being moved from home to home. To exemplify, Gladys reflects on how one of the few times she “was lucky to be black” was when the older Aboriginal girls came over to bathe the younger ones “because the older Aboriginal girls always gave us black babies an extra kiss and cuddle” (241). Such passages should provide opportunities for analysis and reflection in the classroom.

Intercultural attitudes are comprised of the students’ curiosity and openness about another culture and the readiness to attempt to understand another person’s perspective. The story of Daisy, Sally’s grandmother, is possibly the most candid and there is a multitude of examples to take from when it comes to understanding the view of a person from a different culture. The following passage recounts the hardships of the Aboriginals where Daisy lived:

The people were really hungry sometimes, poor things. They didn’t get enough you see. And they worked hard. You had to work hard, if you didn’t do it, then
they call the police in to make you work hard … Aah, you see, the native is different to the white man. (328)

Through Sally, the reader gets to know Daisy as a paranoid and overly suspicious woman, always scrutinizing everyone she does not know or who is not an Aboriginal. However, every page of Daisy’s story provides new insight into why she has developed this disposition. Analysing her character might well encourage a student to put him- or herself in Daisy’s position.

Lastly, critical awareness of oneself is needed to challenge deeply embedded values and behaviours. In Postcolonial Literature – An Introduction, Pramod K. Nayar writes that My Place “problematizes authorial hierarchy” and that the oral culture in the novel is a “bringing-to-surface of stories that are never available” (224). To sum up, this text could possibly offer something which students are perhaps never faced with otherwise in school – a story that can break down previous preconceptions and challenge these deeply embedded values.

3.4 Intercultural Competence and Postcolonial Literature from a Curriculum Perspective

3.4.1 The Curriculum

Taking a closer look at the curriculum for the upper secondary level in Sweden, there are quite a few points that are of importance to this thesis. First of all, the curriculum from 2011 states that students should acquire and develop knowledge and values, and that education in Sweden should “establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values” (4). These statements go hand in hand with the aim of intercultural competence as Michael
Byram, Adam Nichols and David Stevens claim that the “fundamental values position” of all language teaching should be one that “acknowledges respect for human dignity and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction” (7).

In regards to the knowledge aspect of intercultural competence – the understanding of social identities and social groups in both one’s own culture and the target culture – the curriculum expresses that one of the tasks of the Swedish upper secondary school is to “help students to develop an identity that can be related to and encompass not only what is specifically Swedish, but also that which is Nordic, European, and ultimately global” (4). It is also made clear that “[a]n international perspective is important to be able to understand one’s own reality in a global context and in order to create international solidarity” (6).

The skills aspect also concerns the ability to relate to another culture, for example through a certain event. Accordingly, the overall goals and guidelines for the upper secondary school include the ability to use “fiction and other forms of culture as a source of knowledge” (8), and then for students to “have the ability to critically examine and assess what they see, hear and read in order to be able to discuss and take a view on different issues concerning life and values” (9).

Intercultural attitudes could be briefly defined as openness to different cultures and the willingness to put oneself in another’s place. Hopefully, postcolonial literature could be a means of adhering to the curriculum when it comes to the goals of the school which include that all students individually “can empathise with and understand the situation of other people” (10), as well as the overall aim of the school to “promote understanding of other people” (4).

Critical awareness of oneself and one’s values, finally, regards challenging already existing values and behaviours. Correspondingly, the 2011 curriculum determines that students “should develop their ability to think critically”, for example “examine facts and
relationships” (2013 5), and a particular goal for the student is the ability to “consciously determine their views based on knowledge of human rights and fundamental democratic values, as well as personal experiences” (10).

In conclusion, a great number of criteria in the Swedish curriculum for the upper secondary level coincide with Byram’s foundation of intercultural competence. Since the claim I make in this thesis is that postcolonial literature can work as a platform for intercultural competence, a strong connection between intercultural competence and the curriculum is of major importance to that very claim.

3.4.2 The English Courses

Certainly, there is also the need to establish a connection between intercultural competence and postcolonial literature with the aims of the three specific English courses available at the upper secondary level and their core content.

To begin with, the overall aim of English is that students gain “new perspectives on the surrounding world” and a “greater understanding of different ways of living”, that students have the opportunity to “develop knowledge of living conditions, societal issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used”, that language teaching should “encourage students’ curiosity in language and culture”, as well provide them with the opportunity to put the content of spoken and written English in relation to their own knowledge and experiences (2011 53).

These criteria could easily be linked to what Byram sets as a basis for intercultural competence. For example, the desired “understanding of different ways of living” can be coupled with what Byram sees as the knowledge aspect of intercultural competence, namely the understanding of social identities and social groups. The aim to “encourage students’
curiosity in language and culture” can be linked to the aspect of intercultural attitudes, which concerns the need for curiosity and openness to put oneself in another’s perspective. The skills aspect, meaning the skill to interpret and relate to a document or an event from another culture and also the skill to attain new knowledge of a culture and how it functions, could be linked here to the opportunity to develop knowledge about living conditions, societal issues and cultural features in different contexts. Finally, critical awareness of oneself and one’s values can be coupled with the opportunity to put content of spoken and written English in relation to one’s own knowledge and experiences.

Moving on to the specific English courses, it perhaps goes without saying that fiction is part of the English 5 course (for students attending year one of the upper secondary level). Additionally, the course should contain how the English language spread across the globe and also deal with the position of the English language in the world today (2011 54). In that sense, postcolonial literature lends itself well to covering these course criteria. To exemplify, with My Place an EFL class could discuss Australian English, the colonization of Australia as well as discuss Australia today. English 5 also should include the previously mentioned opportunity to “develop knowledge of living conditions, societal issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” and subject areas where students can reflect on thoughts, experiences, emotions and ethical issues (54), which is also possible to accomplish by using a text such as My Place.

Unsurprisingly, when it comes to the course English 6, for students attending year two, fiction is part of the core content here as well. There is a progression, however, which has to do with understanding “themes” and “ideas” in fiction as well as learning “strategies to search for relevant information in larger amounts of text … and to understand perspectives and implied meaning” (2011 60). Naturally, such analyses are possible with any type of literature, but since aims for English 6 state that the content should deal with cultures and various issues
in parts of the world where English is used postcolonial literature provides texts with which several criteria can be covered simultaneously.

For English 7 (students in year three), the core content is quite similar to that of English 6, at least in regards to the use of postcolonial literature. Focus lies on fiction (both contemporary and older literature). The course should also yield perspectives on cultural and societal issues, introspective reflection, and also the analysis and discussion of attitudes and values (Skolverket 2011).

In summation, the argument made here is that by introducing a postcolonial text, such as *My Place*, to an EFL class at the upper secondary level teachers can adhere to both the overall aims and goals of the curriculum and the aims for the English courses and their core content. Specifically regarding *My Place* students will probably get to know a side of Australia they have never experienced before. Perhaps their perception may even be a romanticised picture of Australia, which now can be brought up for discussion and analysis. There is also the matter of World Englishes and that aspect of the language learning, as well as the history and culture of this English-speaking country. Moreover, there is the opportunity to tackle aspects of fundamental values.

4. Method and Material

4.1 Method

A study based on qualitative interviews is always phenomenological in some sense (Stensmo 121), and furthermore this degree project, to a certain extent, could be categorised as action research. I.e. the study does strive to influence didactic practices in one way or another, which Anita Eriksson claims is characteristic of action research (175). The interview questions were
composed using the qualitative method and the analysis of the interviews was also qualitative in its execution. Sonja Kihlström writes that analyses of qualitative interviews aim to discern individuals’ different ways of thinking, and how they describe and perceive different phenomena and events in their everyday life (162), which is precisely the aim of the interviews conducted for this study. In that regard, the approach taken here is a phenomenological one since the interview material contains teachers’ individual and unique “experiences” of using postcolonial literature in the EFL classroom (Stensmo 108-109).

However, qualitative research such as action research often involves concerns regarding for example validity and reliability, and also regarding the possibility to make generalisations based on the results of the study (Eriksson 2007; Stensmo 2002). These concerns will be brought up for discussion in relation to the current study in the following chapter.

4.2 Discussion on Limitations, Ethics and Epistemology

In order to carry out this study there was the need to limit certain areas of the study. First of all, the school level chosen for this thesis was the upper secondary level since this is the level for which I have studied to become authorised to teach at, and thus the level at which I made my student-teacher placement. Secondly, due to the limited time frame of this thesis course as well as the teacher-student placement there was also the need to limit the number of teachers to interview – a practical issue. Because of this time constraint, combined with the limited time the interviewees were available, the length of the interviews was limited as well. Furthermore, this did not allow for the following up of certain aspects of the interviews. Ultimately I received responses from seven teachers. However, two of the interviews do not serve as material here since they were not completed and thus five interviews serve as the primary material for analysis. Four interviews were conducted in person during my teacher-
student placement in 2014 and one interview (with “Moa”) was conducted via telephone in May of 2015.

In Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning, published by Vetenskapsrådet, ethical demands and recommendations for protecting the individuals participating in a given study are presented. Vetenskapsrådet name four core ethical demands (2002 6-14), the first of which concerns the interviewee being informed about the aim of the study. The participants were verbally informed of the purpose of the current study. It is also vital to have the interviewee’s consent, which is why the participants signed a written consent. Next, the demand on confidentiality concerns information about the participants. When it comes to the presentation of the results the identities of the interviewees were exchanged for pseudonyms and the locations of the places where they work were kept anonymous. The fourth demand states that the material extracted from the interviews should be used in the specific study exclusively, information that was included in the consent form mentioned above.

As mentioned previously, epistemological considerations regarding the present study concern validity and reliability as well generalisation. Ideally, a larger number of interviewees would have provided more material to analyse and the relatively small number of participants could raise concerns regarding possibilities of generalisation, which Eriksson writes is common criticism regarding the scope of most action research (180). However, in Vetenskapsteori och metod för lärare, Christer Stensmo argues that the possibility to make generalisations based on action research lies in the ability to use the results in a different context (52). This claim is strengthened by Sonja Kihlström who indicates that it is the generalisation process, rather than what is general per se, which is most important, and that it is important to be able to put the results in another perspective than the most immediate one (233). This is certainly the case with this degree project.
4.3 Material

The primary material used for this thesis are the responses in the interviews with the teachers that where part of this research. The interviews were conducted in English and were based on a number of questions that are presented in an appendix.

Moreover, since intercultural competence is the theoretical basis of this paper, secondary sources will include literature on intercultural competence. First and foremost the works of Michael Byram will be utilised. Claire Kramsch’s writings on culture and language also serve as a basis for the theoretical foundation. In addition secondary sources regarding the definition of postcolonial literature were of importance to this study as well as literature on methodology. *My Place* by Sally Morgan is a concrete example of postcolonial literature included to strengthen the theoretical foundation of the present study, and this text could be viewed as a secondary source as well.

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this section the results from the interviews will be presented, analysed and discussed. The responses, and the analyses of them, will be brought up thematically in the following subchapters. To reiterate, the identities of the interviewees have been exchanged for pseudonyms, namely Astrid, August, Elsa, Moa and Selma.

5.1 Intercultural Competence and Postcolonial Literature in the EFL Classroom

As stated in the theory section, intercultural competence in language teaching could be viewed as a combination of language- and culture didactics with the overall aim of developing
the understanding of different cultures and critical awareness of one’s own attitudes. In this sub-section, it will be discussed whether the interviewees in any way referred to the teaching of intercultural competence or if their responses could be linked to intercultural competence, and if their use of postcolonial literature could be connected to intercultural competence. A brief recapitulation of Byram’s factors of intercultural competence will be given here:

• The knowledge aspect of intercultural competence concerns understanding of the intricacies of social identities and social groups in both the learner’s own culture and the target culture.
• The skill to interpret a document or an event from another culture and the ability to relate this to one’s own culture is part of the skills aspect.
• The skill to attain new knowledge of a culture and how it functions.
• Intercultural attitudes are defined as curiosity and openness and the willingness to put oneself in the perspective of another person.
• Finally, critical awareness of oneself and one’s values. (35-40)

To begin with, several interesting points of discussion will be brought up presently, and they are included in the following exchanges between Moa and myself that are presented below:

Interviewer: Have you previously heard or read about intercultural competence?
Moa: Yes […] I have heard about it.

Interviewer: How would you describe it?
Moa: I imagine it has to do with the ability to communicate […] in various ways […] with people from other cultures. (Telephone Interview, 18 May 2014)
What Moa describes as intercultural competence here more resembles how Byram defines intercultural communicative competence (1997 3-4). Although intercultural communicative competence does deal with the ability to relate to another person it is not quite the equivalent of intercultural competence. In other words, Moa is probably aware of the most basic aspect of intercultural competence. It is worth noting that Moa was the only interviewee that had had heard of or read about intercultural competence.

The next exchange delves into Moa’s views on the combination of language- and culture didactics:

Interviewer: Do you think culture is an important part of learning a foreign language?
Moa: I think culture is a very important part of learning a foreign language.
Interviewer: Why?
Moa: Swedish pupils have a fairly good idea of the different countries belonging to the English-speaking world […] but they still need to learn more about life in most of those countries […] It is also important to have some idea of historic background to understand why people in the English-speaking world relate to the world around them the way they do.
Interviewer: So how do you incorporate culture when you teach?
Moa: I try to incorporate culture by reading various texts from different parts of the English-speaking world […] and in connection with this show where these places are on a world map. (Telephone Interview, 18 May 2014)

Overall the above statements seem to point towards Moa’s view of culture’s place in language teaching mostly involving facts about countries and cultures, basically what Kramsch names
“transmission of information” about another culture (1993 205). For example, she shows the location of a country on a map. However, Moa does mention the importance of understanding the mentality of people from the English-speaking world and understanding how they relate to the world, which is more reminiscent of Byram’s factors of intercultural competence displayed above.

Interestingly, when discussing the use of postcolonial literature, Moa answered that she sometimes includes postcolonial literature in her courses when she wants the students to “dig a bit deeper into the culture of a certain country” (Telephone Interview, 18 May 2014). Examples of such situations would be projects about for instance Canada or Australia with the aim of learning more about the development of a specific country where English is used. When requested to elaborate on why she uses postcolonial literature, the following exchange ensued:

Interviewer: Why have you used it?
Moa: I think literature […] postcolonial as well as other literature […] is an excellent way of introducing life and culture in the English-speaking world.
Interviewer: In what way?
Moa: Through stories you can see and feel […] and get to know and understand life […] culture […] in other times or countries as if you were part of it […] There is no other way for this for most of our pupils. (Telephone Interview, 18 May 2014)

The last part of this exchange symbolises the claim made in this thesis that using postcolonial literature provides a possibility for also teaching intercultural competence. Moa reflects on the way a student can acquire knowledge about another culture but first and foremost she
seemingly focuses on the understanding of that culture and the ability for the student to put her- or himself in the perspective of another person or culture, which is the essence of intercultural competence.

To continue, when asked about why she includes postcolonial literature as part of her teaching, Selma answered that “it gives students a quite good knowledge of society, history and culture in those countries” and that “it widens their knowledge […] I believe […] and are eye-openers to other Englishes throughout the world” (Personal Interview, 12 December 2014). Similarly, Astrid responded that she incorporates postcolonial texts in her teaching “because they give the students a wider perspective of the world […] and especially knowledge about the history of many English-speaking countries” (Personal Interview, 26 November 2014). To refer back to Kramsch, the “especially” in the quote above here seems to be more in line with what she describes as simply learning facts about a different culture rather than having the students critically challenge preconceptions and fundamental values. Also, Byram writes that, at worst, this slightly more traditional view on cultural learning in the classroom could involve “decontextualised factual information with minimal relationship to the language learning focus at a given moment (1997 65). According to Oliver St. John, in an article in Mångkulturella aspekter på språkundervisningens kommunikativa praktiker – en konferensrapport, teachers view foreign cultures as “generalised units” and that there are static clusters of characteristics that define them (152), which also points towards this tendency of a rather factual perspective on culture. The argument here is not necessarily that this approach is generally insufficient or that it does not follow the curriculum, but as far as teaching intercultural competence is concerned Byram suggests that more depth is favourable.

However, when asked to expand on what she means with “a wider perspective”, Astrid gave the following response:
Wider perspective could be explained as when reading or discussing these texts we get new angles in terms of for example time [...] the historical perspective [...] colonialism [...] and postcolonialism [...] gender, social class [...] such conditions” (Personal Interview, 26 November 2014).

The discussing of texts in order to arrive at new perspectives is significant as this basically is the foundation of all aspects of intercultural competence, and it is at least indicative of a view that the cultural component of language learning goes beyond simply learning facts about a country. In Orientalism Said writes that “[t]elevision, the films, and all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds” (26), and if a text can help students, who probably get most of their information from social media, to re-evaluate already embedded attitudes with the help of critical awareness, the EFL classroom has certainly served its purpose to some extent.

Elsa and August, who replied that they in fact do not use postcolonial literature, could still see the benefits of utilising this body of literature. Elsa specifically referred to the curriculum and the fact that students should have the opportunity to develop knowledge of parts of the world where English is used, for example knowledge about living conditions, social issues and cultural features. Elsa said that “all these things could for instance be found in a novel by Coetzee” and also discussed the demand on literature in the curriculum, stating that “it would seem like a good idea to combine the demand for cultural features with the demand for literature” (Personal Interview, 28 November 2014). The combination of cultural- and language didactics – with the use of postcolonial literature – that Elsa discusses corresponds with what Byram describes as the acquisition of knowledge about a different culture through analysis linked to the acquisition of language (1997 65). In Language, Teachers, Politics, and Cultures, Byram and Risager come to the conclusion that teachers in
general can “often see the significance of the cultural dimension” but that they rarely go beyond “aspects of culture … already found in textbooks” (105). Notably, Selma mentioned that she, when turning to postcolonial literature, uses extracts from novels found in their textbook because it is “convenient and practical” (Personal Interview, 12 December 2014). In order to teach intercultural competence in the EFL classroom, Ann-Kari Sundberg recommends utilising one’s own experiences of what is different to lay the foundation for discussing values, judgements and attitudes in the classroom, and thus include the cultural dimension of language teaching (115). If a selection of postcolonial texts is not available perhaps this is a key to teaching intercultural competence regardless.

Indeed, it does seem as if these teachers definitely take into account the introduction of different cultures while teaching language. It is questionable, however, to what extent the cultural aspect of language teaching is taken advantage of in terms of challenging the students’ values, judgements and attitudes, although it appears reasonable to believe that all of the teachers here wish for their students to become more critical in their thinking and more open-minded in regards to different cultures. It is also interesting that the interviewees seem to have realised the value of postcolonial literature in particular, the two respondents who do not include these texts or authors in their courses included. These answers would certainly imply that the interviewed teachers, at some level, at the very least attempt to teach intercultural competence. As only one of the respondents had previously heard of intercultural competence, however, it is probably unlikely that they consciously aim for this. Rather, it seems reasonable to assume that in trying to incorporate fundamental values as part of their English courses some kind of combination of culture- and language teaching is achieved. An additional reflection regarding the use of postcolonial literature is that when the teachers decide on this particular body of literature it is with the specific aim of incorporating the study of culture.
5.2 Why Not?

Although the interviewees could all appreciate the benefits that follow with using postcolonial literature in an EFL classroom, none of the responses indicate that these teachers consistently turn to postcolonial texts or authors, if they actually utilise them at all in their courses. Two participants did not employ postcolonial texts at all, and possible reasons to not use postcolonial literature found in the interviewees responses, even though they claim to value the benefits of using it, will be discussed below in the following two sub-sections referred to as “ability” and “availability”.

5.2.1 Ability

Analysing the interview results, there appears to be a general belief among the interviewees that postcolonial literature in some way is more difficult than other literature. To exemplify, when asked about her students’ reactions to postcolonial texts, Selma answered that she “most often choose to use postcolonial literature in English 6 and 7” because students “might find the texts difficult at times” (Personal Interview, 12 December 2014). Furthermore, August explained that he exclusively teaches English to students from the Child and Recreation programme and highlighted this as the reason for not using postcolonial literature as they “have many things in English to catch up on” and that the “choice of literature is selected on the basis of their preferences” (Personal Interview, 2 December 2014). The reasons given here could possibly be linked to what Byram and Risager describe as teachers’ frustration with attempting to incorporate culture in their language teaching due to “pressures to produce measurable results and focus on linguistic competence” (105). The focus on linguistic competence could certainly be set in direct relation to August’s response.

Moreover, Elsa lamented her students’ ability replying that the notion of getting her
students to “understand the finer themes and motifs in a Coetzee novel seems a little bit farfetched” (Personal Interview, 28 November 2014). Yet again it is implied that postcolonial literature in some manner is more difficult than other texts. Perhaps this view is due to the fact that the postcolonial authors the interviewees are aware of in fact write quite difficult texts in relation to the level of students in the EFL classroom at the upper secondary level. St John writes that this is indeed indicative of many language teachers and he reflects on the possibility of teachers believing that culture cannot be communicated at all if the elementary language skills are not adequate (148). Tornberg also discusses the argument that students need to have a certain level of linguistic competence in order to exchange views on for example politics and morals, although she claims that the classroom is an excellent forum for doing just that (2000 275). Kramsch shares the latter opinion and argues that “[o]ne of the greatest sources of difficulty for foreign readers is less the internal cohesion of the text than the cultural cohesion of the discourse” and writes that more cultural knowledge can overcome obstacles in a given text (1998 59), which perhaps is why teachers should elect to use postcolonial literature since both aspects of learning could be combatted simultaneously.

When asked about her students’ reactions to postcolonial texts, Selma’s response was that the students “might find the texts difficult at times” but that “they are usually interested and motivated” (Personal Interview, 12 December 2014). Taking that answer into consideration, it is perhaps worthwhile struggling with language issues in the initial phase of working with a text. Selma touches upon students’ motivation here, and naturally, students’ motivation will always be one of the most common hurdles for teachers, and motivation is of course partly in the hands of the student and partly the responsibility of the teacher. The teacher needs to be able to motivate his or her students and students need to be motivated in order to learn. The following exchange between Elsa and I is a pregnant example of her struggles with motivating students:
Interviewer: Why haven’t you used Coetzee?

Elsa: I think including Coetzee would be a hard task […]

Interviewer: Why?

Elsa: The vocal pupils feel a strong aversion towards books […] now that we are working with *Angela's Ashes* they constantly whine and complain […] "Why do we have to read books?" […] "Why can't we just watch the movie?" […] "Are you going to force us to read more books?" (Personal Interview, 28 November 2014).

Both Selma and Astrid mentioned more positive responses to their use of postcolonial literature and that they had used shorter texts in form of excerpts from novels (Personal Interview, 12 December, 2014; 26 November, 2014). This is perhaps a key to managing both motivation and level of difficulty. With a shorter text consisting of only a few well-chosen pages the language level will be more manageable as the students do not have to deal with a huge amount of new words and other information, and getting the students to feel like they can manage a text may increase motivation. At the same time, the teacher can focus on more specific issues, thus analysing them more thoroughly – for example motifs and themes, which Elsa mentioned was unlikely. Of course, a teacher has to be realistic about what his or her students can manage but, as Håkan Jenner argues, a teacher’s expectations on the students are extremely influential when it comes to how students perform (65-69). Possibly, then, the notion of using material initially perceived as more difficult should not be abandoned so easily.

To continue, since only one of the interviewees had previously heard of intercultural competence (or in that case perhaps intercultural communicative competence) it may be of
note to mention the aspect of teachers’ ability to teach intercultural competence. In Gagnestam’s study, *Kultur i Språkundervisning – med fokus på engelska*, teachers generally view the role of culture in learning English as more important than students. It is notable, however, that more students than teachers were of the opinion that being able to identify with values, attitudes and ways of thinking in other cultures is the most important part of understanding a different culture while teachers prioritised specific knowledge about other cultures (190). To a certain degree that level of priority is reflected in this study as well and it may be that hierarchy which Lundgren refers to when she describes the neglected potential of the EFL classroom as a forum for focusing on fundamental values and personal development (22). Undoubtedly, the respondents in this study adhere to the aims of the curriculum and focus on fundamental values as part of their language teaching, and thus it would be interesting to research if this could be developed further with focus on intercultural competence (and perhaps with the help of postcolonial literature).

5.2.2 Availability

A major reason that surfaced when it comes to not turning to postcolonial literature as a source for course material was availability. Astrid commented on the fact that postcolonial authors are difficult to find in school libraries, especially when it comes to locating complete sets for an entire class (Personal Interview, 26 November 2014). This is definitely an issue when a teacher wishes to use postcolonial literature in class. The limited availability of postcolonial literature in school libraries points to a low priority when it comes to buying literature for the libraries. The subject teams are often responsible for what literature is bought for the school for their particular subject and this also points to a low priority.

Accordingly, in *The School Canon: A Study about a Possible School Canon of English*
Literature at Swedish Upper Secondary Schools, Emma Johansson has researched which novels in English exist in multiple copies in school libraries at upper secondary level schools in Sweden. In the list that Johansson provides only two titles out of 75 are postcolonial – *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngoze Adichie. This obvious lack of postcolonial literature would certainly suffice as one reason why it is difficult for teachers to use postcolonial literature in their English courses.

One obstacle that could obviously affect a subject team’s priority in regards to postcolonial literature is the teachers’ knowledge of postcolonial literature. For example, although Elsa suggested that she would use Coetzee in the future, she also answered that she was “not familiar with any other author of postcolonial literature” (Personal Interview, 28 November 2014). In addition, Astrid noted that students responded especially well to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Personal Interview, 26 November 2014), which in itself is immensely positive, however this text is probably more colonial than anything else.

Returning to Elsa, the following exchange could perhaps reveal much about her difficulties related to acquiring more knowledge of postcolonial literature:

Interviewer: If you were introduced to more doable postcolonial literature, would you then consider using it?
Elsa: […] The simple answer to your question is: yes […] yes I would. The keyword is of course "introduced" […] I interpret this as "you would not have to find it yourself".
Interviewer: How do you mean?
Elsa: […] Time is of the essence and at the moment my schedule is packed to bursting […] Any suggestion that could buy me time and energy is more than welcome […] I would love if someone else could find this "more doable
An issue that is made visible here is the time available to immerse oneself in a new body of literature and thus broaden the material a teacher can have at his or her disposal when planning a course. Probably, all teachers experience the effects that the expanded role of the teacher have on the amount of work needed for an adequate performance, and understandably, planning and teaching based on what one already knows and is comfortable with is more efficient. This lack of time to explore new literature is perhaps one reason why Gagnestam found that studying culture in the EFL classroom mostly involve the US or Great Britain (8-9).

In summation, two issues that seem to stand in the way of utilising postcolonial literature are the absence of postcolonial authors in school libraries – especially when a class set is needed – and the minute amount of time available to discover and internalise new literature. Since subject teams are often responsible for which texts are bought for each school year the second issue here probably affects the first. If the members of the subject teams are not aware of postcolonial literature it is unlikely that such texts will be purchased for the school library and definitely not in class sets.

5.3 Preferred Literature

In an article part of Developing Intercultural Competence in Practice, Ewa Burwitz-Melzer claims that not only do fictional texts “invite their readers to view subjectively a nation or an ethnic group by portraying specific values, prejudices and stereotypes” but, she argues, they also “offer their audience the chance to exchange their culturally restricted points of view together with the hero or heroine of the narrative, or with the narrator telling the story” (29).
As fiction is a cornerstone of all English courses, and since the claim made in this study is that postcolonial literature is suitable when teaching intercultural competence, all of the interviewees who answered that they use or have used postcolonial literature were asked about which authors or texts they employ. The more frequently mentioned authors will be discussed in this section, namely J.M. Coetzee and Chinua Achebe, as well as Doris Lessing.

To begin with, the works of Coetzee have "generated a plethora of scholarly research both in South Africa and abroad and have challenged readers globally, not least for the contentious interventions”, and in addition the majority of his work deals with "colonial discourse, the other, racial segregation, censorship, banning and exile, police brutality and torture” (Poyner 1). In regards to the demands of the curriculum it is stated that the education should “represent and impart” for example “individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people … and solidarity between people” (4), and based on the description of Coetzee’s writings here it is not difficult to imagine how a Coetzee novel could prove useful if an EFL teacher strives to teach any aspect of intercultural competence.

Secondly, Ruth Franklin from the New Yorker writes that Chinua Achebe has "consistently argued for the right of Africans to tell their own story in their own way, and has attacked the representations of European writers”. However, Franklin argues, "he also did not reject European influence entirely, choosing to write not in his native Igbo but in English, a language that, as he once said, 'history has forced down our throat.'” (2). Furthermore, Franklin quotes Achebe and writes that he worked to "exorcise the ghosts of colonialism”, that African postcolonial authors are "fashioning a new man”, and that "Achebe began the literary reclamation of his country’s history from generations of colonial writers.” (1,5). A writer such as Achebe understandably suits the combination of language and culture, especially if one considers the core content of the English courses. For example, the course should include “[l]iving conditions, attitudes, values and traditions, as well as social, political
and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used”, and also “[t]he spread of English and its position in the world” (54). Considering what Franklin writes about Achebe’s works, his texts should be suitable when attempting to teach intercultural competence with the use of postcolonial literature while at the same time adhering to the curriculum.

Lastly, In Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook, Christine W. Sizemore writes that Doris Lessing “is marked not only by the colonial’s ambiguous relationship to the English literary tradition but also by the landscape of Africa that creates a unique perspective on humankind” (282), and also that Lessing “mixes memories of her childhood in the bush with analysis of current political situations” (285). The connections between postcolonial literature and intercultural competence as well as postcolonial literature and the Swedish curriculum have been discussed extensively in the current study, and the statements above regarding Lessing’s texts seemingly strengthen the veracity of said connections.

The descriptions above are probably applicable to most postcolonial authors, though, and so the question is why these three authors in particular seem to attract teachers’ attention. One reason for this could obviously be availability and popularity. As mentioned previously, both Lessing and Coetzee are Nobel Prize laureates and hence are more likely to figure in the consciousness of teachers using English literature at a regular basis, and also more easily accessible. The difficulty of finding postcolonial literature in school libraries has been discussed previously, but the chance of finding it is probably much greater if the author in question is as renowned as these three.
6. Summary and Conclusion

To summarise, in the current study it has been argued that postcolonial literature covers much of the fundamental values expressed in the Swedish curriculum as well as the aims for, and core content of, the English subject at the upper secondary level, especially when it comes to combining language studies with the study of culture. It has also been argued that the opportunity that the EFL classroom opens up for regarding this combination of language- and culture didactics provides a platform for intercultural competence. Therefore, it has been discussed why teachers at the upper secondary level in Sweden use postcolonial literature when they teach English and also if the reason for the use of postcolonial literature can be linked to teaching intercultural competence. Which postcolonial literature the interviewees utilise was also examined. The results from five interviews provided the main material for these analyses.

Three out of the five teachers taking part here answered that they currently use postcolonial literature in their English courses, however the remaining two could also clearly envision the value postcolonial literature could have when incorporating culture in language teaching. Each respondent also expressed a belief that culture has an immensely important place in the realm of English as a foundation subject, and the reason for choosing postcolonial texts almost exclusively concerned introducing students to different countries and cultures of the English-speaking world. However, there appeared to be a tendency towards focusing on facts about countries and cultures rather than having the students discuss fundamental values. Kramsch, for example, argues that simply scratching the surface is inadequate and some answers pointed towards a more analytical and critical approach, which definitely adheres to what Lundgren writes about the possibility of the subject of English as a platform for developing intercultural competence.
Regarding why teachers do not use postcolonial literature, two main factors have been discussed here – ability and availability. First of all, several teachers mentioned the level of difficulty of this body of literature in relation to students’ inability to manage these texts, and hence it was evident that postcolonial literature was not introduced until English 6 or 7. There seems to be a misconception, however, that postcolonial literature per se is more difficult than other texts. Students’ motivation was also highlighted, and according to the responses from two of the interviewees it seems that excerpts from novels are useful to deal with issues such as difficulty and motivation. Secondly, the accessibility of postcolonial literature in school libraries has been discussed as a reason to why it has been excluded by some of the interviewees. Teachers’ lack of knowledge when it comes to postcolonial literature has been referred to as a possible reason for the miniscule number of postcolonial texts in school libraries as teachers themselves are often responsible for which texts are purchased.

In conclusion, teachers clearly use postcolonial literature at the upper secondary level or are at least aware of the potential it holds in relation to the curriculum. However, as only one of the respondents had previously heard of intercultural competence it is not likely that they consciously attempt to teach intercultural competence. It does appear likely, though, that the participants in the study are very keen on incorporating culture in their language teaching and that they have found a role for postcolonial literature in that regard. Thus, it seems possible that intercultural competence is taught unconsciously with the help of postcolonial literature. Regarding this body of literature it is also possible to deduct that certain postcolonial authors are more commonly used than others and that this is related to the respondents’ knowledge of postcolonial literature.

Finally, as discussed in the method section, the number of participants in this study was relatively small and thus further research is needed. Although the limitations of this study also limit the possibilities of generalisation, what can be ascertained from the results is that the
teachers in this context either use postcolonial literature in order to combine language and culture to affect their students in some manner, or that they at least are aware of the possibility of doing so.
Works Cited


“August”. Personal Interview. 2 December 2014.


“Moa”. Personal Interview. 25 May 2014.


Appendix

The Interview Questions

The following questions were the basis for the interviews. Naturally, follow-up questions were utilized as well, but these questions provided the core of the interviews.

1. Have you previously heard or read about the term intercultural competence? How would you describe it or what would you imagine it entails?

2. Do you think culture is an important part of learning a foreign language? Why? Why not? In what ways do you incorporate culture when you teach English?

3. When teaching English at the upper secondary level, do you use (or have you used) postcolonial literature. Why have you used it? Why not?

4. Which texts/authors have you used? What specifically made you use these texts/authors?

5. In what ways could you see the EFL-classroom, and perhaps more specifically postcolonial literature, as a platform for understanding different cultures?