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15 högskolepoäng, avancerad nivå

”It’s not a term that I’ve ever used”  
Teachers’ Interpretations of Interculturality in EFL-teaching

Lärares tolkningar av interkulturalitet i engelskundervisning

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Mathilda conducted and transcribed three out of five interviews, and Sarah conducted and transcribed the rest. However, both of us were present at all interviews. Mathilda wrote the first draft of the introduction and theoretical literature review section 3.1, and Sarah wrote the first draft of section 3.2 and 3.3. The method chapter was divided equally between us. In the results and analysis chapter, we discussed and decided together on what quotes to include and how these would be connected to our theoretical background. We then divided the sections between us. We revised the whole text jointly and worked closely together during the whole project. We wrote the concluding discussion together.
Abstract

The purpose of this degree project was to investigate teachers’ conscious and unconscious interpretations of interculturality. We interviewed five teachers from different schools in order to analyse how intercultural their teaching of culture in EFL is. We investigated how their schools encourage cultural diversity, whether intercultural aspects are incorporated in their EFL-teaching and how they interpret the term interculturality. The Swedish national curriculum (Skolverket 2011a), Byram’s (1997) five savoirs and Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile provided us with the theoretical background for the analysis. Our findings suggest that there are teachers who do not incorporate intercultural aspects into their EFL-teaching, as well as teachers who include some aspects. Among our five teachers there is an uncertainty concerning interculturality and how it should be a part of their teaching. Our conclusion is that since it is no longer optional in Swedish schools to incorporate interculturality into EFL-teaching, it is necessary to raise an awareness of the term among principals, teachers and teacher students.

*Keywords:* interculturality, intercultural competence, EFL, the five savoirs, Byram
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1. Introduction

In today’s internationalised society where people travel, work and educate themselves across national borders, people from different cultural backgrounds meet continuously. Sweden is becoming increasingly multicultural due to migration, which demands that the Swedish educational system encourages an openness towards other cultures and living conditions (Skolverket 2011a). Interculturality involves being open towards others and taking an interest in their cultural backgrounds, as well as being critically aware of your own culture and how it relates to others’ (Byram 1997).

According to the syllabus for English for years 4-6, the teaching of English should give students “the opportunities to develop their ability to: […] reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket 2011a, p. 32). The commentary material for the syllabus for English also state that intercultural competence (IC) is an important part of all-round communicative skills, since cultural aspects are important when adapting one’s language to different situations, purposes and recipients (Skolverket 2011b). It is thus clear that a teacher of English in Sweden cannot ignore the cultural aspects of foreign language education.

Despite the importance of IC, numerous studies in Finland and Sweden suggest that teachers still lack intercultural aspects in their teaching (Gagnestam 2005; Larzén 2005; Lundgren 2002). This raises the question as to what knowledge teachers in Sweden have in this area. In the current study, we will use interviews to investigate how one subset of Swedish teachers, those teaching 4-6 in Southern Sweden, interpret (consciously or unconsciously) the intercultural aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Our analysis centres on Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile, which was developed from Byram’s (1997) framework for intercultural competence. This framework can be used to determine whether a person is IC or not. We will also enlist the concepts of “Capital-C culture” and “Small-c culture” (Kramsch 2013; Larzén 2005). According to Kramsch (2013) and Larzén (2005) two categories of culture can be distinguished when considering the integration of cultural aspects in foreign language (FL) teaching. Briefly, the first category, “Capital-C culture”, deals with arts, literature, and music whereas the second, “Small-c culture”, deals with habits, norms, and values. While neither of these
categories specifically focus on intercultural aspects, “Small-c culture” can be connected to the current national curriculum’s view on culture as “living conditions, social and cultural phenomena” (Skolverket 2011a, p. 32) and thus is a useful construct to consider when working with the Skolverket directive.

1.1. Research Question

The purpose of this degree project is to investigate how teachers of English in Sweden in years 4-6 interpret, consciously or unconsciously, the intercultural aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Through interviews we want to investigate how schools encourage cultural diversity, analyse EFL-teachers’ understanding of the concept of interculturality, and how it is incorporated into their teaching of culture.

In order to investigate this area we have decided on the following research question:

- How is interculturality interpreted by EFL-teachers in years 4-6?
2. Theoretical Literature Review

The concepts of culture and interculturality have different meanings depending on context. In this text they will be described in relation to language teaching and learning. This theoretical literature review is divided into two sections: *Interculturality in Language Teaching* and *Interculturality in the Swedish Curriculum*. The first section discusses how interculturality is relevant for language teaching, and the second section explains its relevance for EFL-teaching in Sweden by connecting it to the Swedish national curriculum (Skolverket 2011a).

2.1. Interculturality in Language Teaching

One of the main objectives in language teaching is to introduce students to the globalised world and the cultures within it. Another objective is to develop an awareness for, and reflect over, differences and similarities between one’s own and other cultures (Skolverket 2011b). Introducing the students to the globalised world and developing their cultural awareness demands more than studying factual knowledge about foreign cultures. The students need to be exposed to, and reflect over, their own culture and others’ (Skolverket 2011a). By interviewing teachers, student teachers and students in upper secondary education in Sweden, Gagnestam (2005) found that being exposed to foreign cultures is both important and motivational for language learners. Traditionally, culture has been part of language teaching in the form of factual knowledge about the *target culture* (TC).

Kramsch’s (1993) interpretation of culture in language teaching is that culture is always present when learning a FL. Gagnestam (2005), when discussing Kramsch’s theories, argues that culture is a confusing and challenging aspect of language learning, revealing the learners limitations in communication. She emphasises that the cultural aspects of FL-teaching has traditionally promoted the view of objectively learning about a TC. Culture has been taught as factual knowledge through the *target language* (TL) instead of something that is part of the TL (Gagnestam 2005). Although culture is mainly
a social construction, Kramsch (2013) argues that this has been ignored in language teaching.

Risager (2005) further problematizes Kramsch’s (1993) views on the relationship between culture and language by discussing two different views on this relationship. The first is that language and culture are inseparable, that language is bound to a culture, history and mentality. The second is that language and culture are separated phenomena where language is seen as a communicational instrument unaffected by culture. However, Risager (2005) concludes that none of these views describe the nuances in the relationship between language and culture. The first view ignores the international and globalised modern world where one language can be associated with many cultures, and the second view describes language as a neutral code of communication, which is not in any way influenced by culture. In reality, language and culture has a complex relationship and the truth probably lies somewhere in between these two views.

From a normative perspective culture can be divided into two categories, “Capital-C culture”, which refers to a traditional view where culture is seen as arts, music, buildings, literature and monuments and “Small-c culture” which refers to habits, values, norms and everyday products and phenomena (Larzén 2005). Kramsch (2013) agrees with this categorisation and also adds that “Capital-C culture” has been emphasised by states and its institutions, such as schools. Regarding “Small-c culture” she adds that teaching everyday cultural practices often results in a focus on the typical behaviours, foods and customs which can reinforce stereotypes.

In the commentary material for the current syllabus for English (Skolverket 2011b), it is stated that culture is seen as a wide term that should not only include a traditional view on culture such as arts and literature. It also includes traditions, values and important concepts of groups and social contexts where English is used, which is more related to “Small-c culture” than “Capital-C culture”. The students should be given the opportunity to recognise patterns but avoid stereotypes. They should be given support to become aware of patterns in their own everyday context, and to make comparisons to other contexts (Skolverket 2011b). In order to give students these opportunities, the schools need to focus on “Small-c culture” rather than “Capital-C culture” in EFL-teaching. Promoting an openness towards and curiosity for other cultures enables students to develop an intercultural understanding.

Lundgren (2002) conducted a study where she investigated how teachers’ discourses can develop intercultural understanding. She interviewed ten teachers in years 7-9 about
the intercultural dimension in their teaching of English as well as what obstacles and opportunities they identify in teaching interculturality. Her findings suggest that the teachers have varied knowledge of the concept and find it difficult to teach this, because they believe it demands a very high level of English from their students. Lundgren (2002) claims that students should be given the opportunity to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and at the same time become aware of their own cultural background. Lundgren (2002) argues that the fact that ICC is mentioned in the commentary material for the previous syllabus for English, means that it is on its way in to the new syllabus for English. However, the term is not included in the current syllabus.

Even though interculturality is still mentioned in the commentary material for English, the term ICC is no longer mentioned. The commentary material instead states that ICC is a part of the all-round communicative skills.

Byram (1997) introduced the term intercultural competence in the 1990’s. He has changed the norm for FL-teaching from striving towards native-like linguistic and cultural competence, to having IC as the goal. Until the 1990’s, learners were expected to strive towards sounding like a native speaker in accent, phonetic competence and cultural competence (Larzén 2005). Byram (1997) opposed this view because he claimed that there is not one native speaker model to compare the learner with. Also, when it comes to linguistic competence, a learner could never be equal to a native speaker.

Byram’s (1997) views on the norm of the intercultural speaker instead of the native speaker influenced researchers such as Kramsch (2013) and Risager (2005). On account of his work, researchers have come to agree that teaching should enable the learners to interact with other languages and cultures (Larzén 2005). Byram (1997) contributed to the Council of Europe’s language programme and helped develop their definition of interculturality:

> Interculturality involves being open to, interested in, curious about and empathetic towards people from other cultures, and using this heightened awareness of otherness to evaluate one’s own everyday patterns of perception, thought, feeling and behaviour in order to develop greater self-knowledge and self-understanding.

(Council of Europe 2008, p.10)

In addition, Byram (1997) developed a conceptual framework to explain what IC includes, the five savoirs (competences):
• Intercultural attitudes (savoir être): to be curious about others and be open to re-evaluate one’s own beliefs and behaviours. Being able to see one’s own culture from an outside perspective

• Knowledge (savoirs): of social groups and their practices. Also includes knowledge about why these practices exist and the reason behind them. Knowledge about one’s own social group and its relation to other social groups

• Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): being able to relate and compare documents and events from different cultures to each other and to one’s own culture, and integrate it to previous knowledge

• Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): to be able to interpret and understand what is knew knowledge about other cultures and one’s own while interacting. Also, being able to use this knew knowledge in the ongoing interaction

• Critical cultural awareness/political education (savoir s’engager): being aware of one’s own beliefs and values and how they affect the perspective you take on other culture’s beliefs and values

Byram’s (1997) five savoirs have been used as the definition of what it means to be interculturally competent by the Council of Europe. This framework can be applied when discussing whether a person is IC or not. However, when teaching IC, the goal is to help the learners develop an awareness of themselves, and be able to see themselves from other people’s perspectives. Therefore, the best teacher is the person who can help learners notice the relationship between their own culture and others’ (Byram, Gribkova & Starky 2002).

Byram’s (1997) definition of the IC-skills inspired a study conducted by Sercu (2006) where several FL-teachers from seven different countries were asked to complete a survey regarding their conceptions of interculturality and how they teach culture to their students. The findings were then compared to a pre-constructed teacher profile to see whether the teachers fit the profile of an IC-teacher. The profile was developed with mainly Byram’s (1997) definition of interculturality and skills, knowledge and attitudes connected to this:

• Have the knowledge of the foreign cultures and FL they teach, and have contacts with these often and in various forms
Be able to explain similarities and differences between their own and other cultures

Be aware of, and address, students’ stereotypes in the FL-classroom

Be able to develop tasks, materials and content that promote interculturality

Use the five savoirs in their teaching

Be able to teach students to change perspective on their own culture and relate to foreign cultures

Be able to find, use and adjust material in order to achieve the goals of their teaching

Be skilful and use new approaches to culture teaching

Have a positive attitude and work towards integrating IC-teaching into their FL-teaching

Be aware of, and make use of, students perceptions of foreign culture when planning their teaching

The findings suggested that the teachers did not entirely fit the profile of an IC-teacher, however they did match some of the criteria. Sercu (2006) argues that the teachers can be said to be FL and culture teachers, but not IC-teachers. Sercu’s (2006) conclusions are supported by previous research, which suggest that EFL-teachers lack the IC needed to teach IC (Larzén 2005). Larzén (2005) conducted a study investigating how 13 teachers interpret the concept of culture in EFL-teaching and how they specify and attain their personal cultural objectives in their teaching. Her purpose was to find patterns for the intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching. She concluded that few of the teachers had an intercultural approach to EFL-teaching, and that many of the interviewed teachers feel they lack knowledge and skills to teach culture and interculturality.

2.2. Interculturality in the Swedish Curriculum

We now present how interculturality is relevant for the Swedish context by relating its theories to the Swedish national curriculum (Skolverket 2011a), and the commentary material for English (Skolverket 2011b). The commentary material for the syllabus (Skolverket 2011b) for English clearly states that there is a connection between the
The curriculum’s fundamental values and the teaching of English. It also claims that by acquiring new knowledge of living conditions, social issues, and cultural phenomena in different parts of the world where English is used, students are given the opportunity to reflect over these areas without judgement.

Even though the word interculturality is only mentioned once in the curriculum (Skolverket 2011a) (in the syllabus for civics), culture is mentioned in the context of interculturality repeatedly. In the section “Fundamental values and tasks of the school” it is stated that the school should give students and teachers the opportunity to develop an awareness of differences and similarities between one’s own and other cultures. Also, openness towards others, values and traditions should be respected and recognised. In the “Overall goals and guidelines” (Skolverket 2011a) section, it is stated that the school should ensure that students can interact with people from different regions and have knowledge of different living conditions, cultures, languages and religions.

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.

(Skolverket 2011a, p. 12)

Since the curriculum demands that the school has an international perspective, an intercultural approach to EFL-teaching is supported by the curriculum. In order for students to be able to communicate in a society with contacts across cultural boarders, it is necessary for students to be intercultural speakers of English (Byram et al. 2002).

The syllabus for English states that the students have an increased opportunity to take part in different social and cultural contexts if they have knowledge of the English language. Students should be provided with “opportunities to develop knowledge about [...] social and cultural phenomena in the areas and contexts where English is used” (Skolverket 2011a, p. 32). The reason for using areas and contexts where English is used instead of countries, is explained in the commentary material where it is stated that English is present in more contexts than it used to be. The language is not restricted to national borders, and the Swedish curriculum views language as a social phenomenon used in, and by, social groups (Skolverket 2011b).
The curriculum mentions all-round communicative skills as skills for understanding spoken and written English and being able to interact with others (Skolverket 2011a). The commentary material explains that IC is a part of the all-round communicative skills that students are to develop in EFL-teaching. Interculturality helps people interact successfully in situations where cultural differences occur. The intercultural aspects also involve being able to adapt one’s language to different situations, purposes and recipients. This means to be aware of and use some of the cultural codes and language needed to interact in a successful way. The commentary material specifies that it could be the choice of words, use of politeness phrases and how to act in different cultural contexts. Knowledge of social and cultural phenomena is necessary in order for students to understand nuances, references and hidden meaning in the English language when they interact with people, read books and watch films (Skolverket 2011b).

Corbett (2003) argues that an intercultural curriculum focuses on IC instead of a native-like ability to use the TL. The intercultural speaker is a student who knows how to use the TL in different contexts and for different purposes, and adapt the language accordingly. The goal is to use the TL for interaction between people internationally. The learners need to be interculturally competent in the sense that they are able to use culturally appropriate language in a way that a monolingual native speaker would not. A monolingual native speaker does not necessarily have the ability to adapt their language to other cultural groups’ norms and values.

Even though clearly stated in the commentary material (Skolverket 2011b), the term interculturality is not mentioned in the knowledge requirements of the syllabus for English (Skolverket 2011a). Neither the term interculturality nor culture is mentioned in the knowledge requirements for the end of year 6. This could mean that if one does not read the commentary material, the intercultural aspect of the syllabus can be lost. The intercultural aspect of interaction (to adapt one’s language for different purposes) is clarified in the commentary material, although it is not part of the knowledge requirements until grade A for year 6. Not clearly including the cultural aspects in the knowledge requirements leads to difficulties for teachers in assessing those aspects. This could result in teachers prioritising the communicational skills that are easier to assess because the curriculum provides the assessment criteria (Larzén 2005; Lundgren 2002).
3. Methodology

In order to investigate our research question, we interviewed five teachers in grades 4-6 in Sweden. We asked them how they interpret the concept interculturality and how they work with culture in their EFL-classrooms. This provided us with a structure of three themes for the results section: Encouraging cultural diversity, Interculturality in the teaching of culture and Interpretations of interculturality. After discussing whether or not to observe English lessons in order to see how they work with culture, we decided on using interviews as our sole method. Observations are often used in order to see naturally occurring situations. However, this approach may raise certain challenges, since the observer will often influence the situation in one way or another just by observing (Alvehus 2013). If we were to observe English lessons in order to see how culture is taught we would have to choose between being open about our research area and risk influencing the content of the lesson, or not sharing our questions with the teacher and risk spending a lot of time on observing without seeing cultural aspects. We came to the conclusion that interviews could answer all aspects of our research question, if we let the teachers themselves describe how they incorporate cultural aspects in their teaching.

The interview method is an effective tool in order to find out how people look upon or feel about a situation, and the reasons behind their actions (Alvehus 2013). Our research question demanded the interview method in order to get personal answers from the teachers. The phenomenographic interview, which involves investigating teachers’ experiences with open-ended questions regarding a specific area, enabled us to investigate how the teachers interpreted, consciously or unconsciously, the concept of interculturality from a first-person perspective (Brinkkjaer & Høyen 2013). Finding out how teachers interpret this concept was a pre-requisite for further investigating the intercultural aspects of their teaching. In order to interpret and describe what was found during the interviews, we used a hermeneutic analysis to relate back to theories behind intercultural competence (Brinkkjaer & Høyen 2013). A semi-structured interview was the most suitable approach, since in that way we were able to thematise the interview with open-ended questions regarding our research area. These questions can be found in appendix 3. The respondents had the possibility to reflect freely, but still had some guidance as to what our area of interest was (Alvehus 2013). When interviewing the teachers there was a risk of them
modifying their answers in order to match their perceptions of what we expected from them. In order to reduce this risk as much as possible, we did not give them the term interculturality beforehand. However, they knew that our area of interest involved culture which could influence the interviews.

By using an abductive approach to our material, we had the possibility to return to our theoretical foundation in the light of our empirical data. This enabled us to continuously alternate between theory, data and reflection (Alvehus 2013). When analysing our material from the interviews, we used a bricolage of methods which enabled us to adapt different techniques to our material, to get an overview and find interesting themes and quotes. This, in turn, led up to the results section (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

3.1. Participants

We collected data from five interview sessions over a two week period. Our interviewees were teachers of grades 4–6 and we decided on finding as heterogeneous participants as possible in this small scale. A homogeneous selection of respondents would have enabled us to make direct comparisons between respondents, but a more heterogeneous selection gave us a broader view on the subject (Alvehus 2013). Since we were not interested in finding generalizable results, a broader perspective was of interest.

From the beginning we had three respondents. They work in two different cities, two are male and one is female and they have a different amount of experience. One works at an international school. This meant that we needed to find two more respondents. Because two of our respondents work in the same city at two different schools where students mostly have the same high/middle socioeconomic status, and the third works in a school where the students mostly have a middle socioeconomic status, we specifically searched for respondents who work in schools where the students have a low socioeconomic status. Therefore we sent e-mails to 13 teachers and principals in these types of areas, asking them if they knew any EFL-teachers who would be willing to participate in our interviews. This letter can be found in appendix 1. Two teachers replied and said that they were willing to participate. Both were female and worked in schools in the same city. This resulted in five teachers from two different cities in south of Sweden. Teacher respondent demographics are presented below.
Table 1

Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>4-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Procedure

The respondents decided when and where we could meet, and also if the interview would be conducted in Swedish or English. This because we felt that it was important that they could express themselves freely and with nuances. We did not want the language to be a barrier in the interview. The teacher from the international school does not speak Swedish, therefore the choice was naturally English. The rest felt more comfortable conducting the interview in Swedish. All teachers decided on meeting us in their classrooms. The interviews ended up being between 20 and 30 minutes long. Since we used a semi-structured approach to our interviews, the questions varied a bit depending on their answers.

One of the risks in the choice of respondents for this degree project is that we know three of the five interviewees beforehand. This could influence the results unconsciously in the sense that we might hesitate to critically analyse the respondents that we know personally. It could also mean that our interpretations of those interviews are affected by previous feelings towards the respondents. We tried to eliminate this risk by both of us participating in/observing all interviews, and always discussing our interpretations together with this in mind.

When interviewing, it is always important to consider the ethical aspects in order to secure the respondent’s integrity. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) discuss three areas of ethical guidelines: informed consent, confidentiality and consequences.

Informed consent means informing the respondents about the aim of the study, its overall structure and what their participation will lead to. It also means that participating
is voluntary and that they have the right to terminate the interview at any point (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Besides informing our respondents about the aim of the study in our first e-mail, we also brought a list with information about the study and the interview to our meetings. We explained that they would be recorded but completely anonymised in our transcriptions and final degree project, that their participation was voluntary, that they did not have to answer all our questions and that they could terminate the interview at any point. Even though we did not mention the word interculturality before the interview, we informed our respondents about the subject of culture beforehand. We used a funnel approach, where we started by asking warm-up questions, which were then followed by broader questions about culture and the cultural aspects of their teaching. Finally, we asked them for their definition of interculturality and whether this concept is being discussed at their schools. We chose this approach to ensure that their answers were spontaneous and to avoid the risk of them researching interculturality before the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

Confidentiality means that private information that identifies the participants and their schools will not be revealed (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). We have removed all names of persons, schools, places and areas that are mentioned in the interviews in our transcriptions. The only information kept about the respondents was age and gender.

With regards to consequences we assess that the participants will not suffer any consequences from participating in our degree project, since they are completely anonymised and even though it will be published online, its purpose is not to be spread or contribute to any type of change in schools. The purpose of this study is not to put blame on anyone, but to try and find evidence of intercultural teaching of English to be used as a positive example for others.
4. Results and Analysis

The results and analysis chapter has been divided into three sections: Encouraging cultural diversity, Interculturality in the teaching of English, and Interpretations of interculturality. All quotes from four out of five teachers were translated from Swedish to English by the authors. The original transcriptions are available on request. The teachers will be coded as TA (Teacher A), TB (Teacher B), TC (Teacher C), TD (Teacher D), and TE (Teacher E). The interviewer will be coded as S (Sarah).

When transcribing the interviews, we considered our transcriptions’ reliability by first dividing the interviews between us and trying to reproduce what was said word by word, including pauses, laughter, and some relevant gestures. To increase the reliability we have then re-read each other’s transcriptions while listening to the recording, and discussed any differences in our interpretations. Considering that there is no true objective transformation from oral to written form, and that we would need to translate the quotes that we use, the transcriptions did not have to be an exact reproduction (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). In our original transcriptions we have included pauses, repeated words, humming and gestures. However, in order to increase readability when including quotes from our transcriptions, we have transformed the language to a more formal, written style. This choice seemed natural since we had to translate from Swedish to English when quoting from four out of five interviews. Nuances in the original transcriptions have inevitably been lost.

4.1. Encouraging Cultural Diversity

In this section, the teachers and the schools use of students’ cultural background will be presented. We asked the teachers if and how the students’ are encouraged, by them or school policies, to share their cultural background in the classroom and at the school in general. Some of their answers will also be connected to the categories “Capital-c culture” and “Small-c culture”.
TA, who works at an international IB school, was the only respondent who clearly stated that the school has a policy concerning culture. In fact, this seemed to be one of the main objectives of the school:

And I mean, yeah it’s in our mission statement at the school to encourage all nationalities and to build on that, to be truly international. […] So yeah, I think as much as possible we try and encourage it. Yeah I think most of the festivals, the winter festival, we’ve got like the spring bonnet parade, I mean yeah any opportunity to celebrate their cultures and to include everyone in the school, the school tries to do.

(TA)

TA also explained that the winter festival, rather than just being about Christmas, aims at celebrating all cultures. This means that all students and parents are invited to bring cultural artefacts, food and clothes to the school and share with the others. This counts as an example of “Capital-C culture”. In order to include everyone in the school community, all students are encouraged to share their cultural background. One example of this, TA said, was when they recently celebrated their 10 year anniversary and the teachers made a big cake decorated with the flags of every country represented among the students. These events could be interpreted as examples of culture being viewed as a social construction (Gagnestam 2005). TE described a somewhat similar view when it comes to the social aspects of cultural construction at his school. Once a year the school arranges a day where students are divided into mixed groups and where culture and school community are in focus.

And they get to choose what to do and it could be anything, we had hip hop, dance, it was often the children’s own culture, a lot from them, partly what they suggested and got people to come here to teach dance and music for example. And to create jewellery and special ways to do make up and dress. […] And it was amazing, they have a joint cultural experience, ninth graders helping first graders, and first graders helping ninth graders. They also have art work and things, so I guess this could be called a cultural day, and it’s almost the most fun day of the year.

(TE, our translation)

The content of this day fits the description of “Capital-C culture” where traditional things such as music and arts are in focus. The school also has a music profile which means that more than half of the students are in music classes. We noticed that when
TE discussed culture, it was more often than not about “Capital-C culture.” However, the underlying goal of this culture day is to strengthen the school community, and this could be described as “Small-c culture” where the school’s values and norms are in focus (Larzén 2005). When asked about his students previous knowledge of culture and where he thought it came from, he explained that most of his students acquired this from their homes. Many of his students travel frequently and their families prioritise cultural experiences such as famous buildings and arts on these trips. He described his class as very homogeneous in this sense.

TB told us that none of her 80 students have Swedish as their first language and that they all have different cultural backgrounds. Although working at a very multicultural school, in answer to our question about sharing cultural backgrounds in the classroom, she stated:

> You know what, I wish I answered differently now, but I don’t do that. I would like to do it much more than I do, but I probably don’t. I mean, it’s not forbidden but it’s not brought up very often, I have thought about it a lot myself… Uhm… No, not, no. I’ll say no, sadly not.

(TB, our translation)

In addition to this, she told us that the students’ cultural backgrounds are not discussed among the staff and that the school does not have a specific policy on how to incorporate culture or interculturality in their work:

> We don’t have to discuss it a lot, because it is part of our everyday life, I mean, we can’t work here and not be very aware and just know that culture is incredibly important here. And it’s not possible to be here at X-school and X otherwise. So we don’t talk about it that much, if we talk about it, we do it from the fundamental values aspect uhm… How we see it and how we work with it… It’s like, it’s in the walls here.

(TB, our translation)

Even though she explained that she does not encourage her students to share their cultural backgrounds in the classroom, and that the staff does not discuss the subject in any way, she also argued the importance of cultural awareness in the area where she works.
TD also finds the sharing of cultural backgrounds important, but when we asked her about the school policy she expressed an uncertainty on how to incorporate students’ cultural backgrounds:

[Pause] No, I don’t think we have, I mean, I’m thinking about integration instead here, not with culture, you mean that you would use culture and mix sort of their cultures?
Yes, that would have been amazing, but I think it’s easier if you have more adults with different backgrounds.

(TD, our translation)

As an example of how such a cultural meeting could have been arranged she mentioned an earlier work place where some teachers had different first languages, and where they sometimes brought pastries such as cinnamon buns and baklava. Even though she told us earlier that her students come from different backgrounds, speak around eight different languages and have different religious backgrounds, in her recorded interview statements she only mentioned the staff’s lack of cultural diversity. In hindsight, the follow up question we should have asked her is if she believes that the teachers need first-hand experience of the cultures discussed in the classroom or in the school, or if the students’ cultural knowledge is equally valued?

As mentioned earlier, the fundamental values section in the Swedish curriculum states that the students should be given the opportunity to reflect over differences and similarities between one’s own culture and others’ in order to develop cultural awareness (Skolverket 2011a). The subject of English could provide a natural platform for investigating cultural phenomena, since it then would be possible to compare the cultural backgrounds of the students in the classroom with the cultures of all the different areas and contexts where English is used (Skolverket 2011b). Teachers could give their students the opportunity to develop cultural awareness by encouraging them to share their cultural backgrounds and use this cultural knowledge as a foundation for comparison and reflection.

TB argued that cultural awareness is very important at her school, however, she does not seem to emphasise this in her EFL-classroom. Also, she stated that her school does not have a policy regarding this. She did say herself that this is something she wished were different in her teaching. TD also expressed a wish for increased exchange of cultural experiences at her school, but believed that lack of knowledge within the staff is the reason behind this situation. TE, who called his
group of students very homogenous, tries to incorporate his students’ “Capital-C” backgrounds in terms of music, video games, films, and literature that he knows is well-known to his students, and make comparisons which enables them to develop their cultural awareness. TA works in a school-setting where celebrating cultural backgrounds and being open to others is a clearly stated school policy. This is also discussed with the staff and subject to different workshops.

4.2. Interculturality in the Teaching of Culture

The findings presented in this section answers questions about what the teachers believe should be taught with regards to culture in EFL-teaching and their views on what culture means in English teaching. This will then be related to Byram’s (1997) five savoirs, “Capital-C culture”, and “Small-c culture”.

TA started the term with a unit of inquiry where the students investigated cultures. This was suggested by the head mistress as a way of getting to know each other and find common ground in the class.

And that was great, that lasted for about six weeks where they talked about their culture, they researched different cultures from around the world. The last part of that was they gave a presentation on their own cultures, and also why they felt it was important to understand people’s cultures and what problems can happen if you don’t do that. It’s kind of social studies but we looked at everything, like wars and conflicts and kind of to do with religion and cultures. […] So that was quite an important thing that they realised, that if you don’t understand someone’s culture that can be when people have arguments and even wars can start.

(TA)

TA’s description of this type of teaching and learning to some extent relates to three out of five of Byram’s (1997) IC-savoirs. TA described how the students researched other cultures and looked upon their own culture in comparison. They discussed the importance of developing an understanding for others and the consequences if you do not. This relates to the savoir about knowledge of social groups and their practices, which also involves knowledge of one’s own social group and its relation to others’ (Byram 1997). Also, their discussions enabled the students to develop
their intercultural attitudes (savoir être) since they were encouraged to be curious about other cultures. They also discussed their own cultures with others, which helped them look at their own culture from an outside perspective. The discussions also encouraged the students to develop skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire) when they learned new knowledge while interacting with each other on this topic (Byram et al. 2002). Although the students might not fulfill all five savoirs, this unit may have given them the opportunity to develop towards that goal. Keeping in mind their young age, they have the opportunity to continue developing their IC, with the guidance of teachers with intercultural approaches.

TB expressed a very different view on culture in English teaching than TA. She repeatedly mentioned English speaking countries as having one culture which is different from theirs. She did not specify what their culture is. The English speaking countries are later defined by her as Britain and America.

It should be connected to their own everyday lives, so for me it’s probably important that they understand… That the English speaking world have their ways, their cultures, and we have another. We’re not part of the Anglo-Saxon English British imperial picture you know.

(TB, our translation)

These descriptions can be related to a traditional view on culture where factual knowledge of the TC (target culture) is taught through the TL instead of as a part of the TL (Gagnestam 2005). Since she did not specify what the cultural content of her teaching is, it is difficult to determine if it is “Capital-C culture”, “Small-c culture”, or both. A similarly traditional view on culture is expressed by TD in the following statement:

Why do they do that in a restaurant in England and why do they that in America?
Why, or in USA, and how are they in Sweden and that. Culture is such a wide term, I can’t explain it [laugh].

(TD, our translation)

Both TB and TD mentioned only Britain and America, and sometimes Australia, when discussing English speaking countries, even though the word “countries” has deliberately been removed from the syllabus for English (Skolverket 2011b). The phrase used is instead “areas and contexts where English is used” (Skolverket
This is something that TE described as a personal goal for his teaching of culture:

Well, in that case it’s to show how many different cultures there are within the English language and all cultures where English is for instance a second language, such as India, and many countries in Africa and North America and to show that too.

(TE, our translation)

TE was the only respondent who clearly stated that English is used in many different parts of the world and he was the only one who said that it was important to show the students this.

TD seemed to have a wider definition of the term culture than TB, because she mentioned the advantage of making use of students’ own cultural experiences, such as playing video games. In her opinion, video games help students learn English unconsciously:

Video games are also culture by the way, and computer games and stuff like that. They learn English there, so they’re surrounded by English, it’s just that you need to get them to “stop, what language do you hear?” “It’s English!” I mean that they should start listening and understand that they live surrounded by English.

(TD, our translation)

TC also mentioned video games as a positive tool for language development. She views video games as a cultural context where English naturally occurs. She emphasised that English is a global language and that she tries to pass this view on to her students. She wants them to realise that being able to communicate in English is a necessary skill. She frequently mentioned that she wants to use her students’ cultures in her teaching. She did not specify whether she views her students’ culture as one or many. It is difficult to know how her view relates to Byram’s five savoirs, since TC did not explain how she wants to teach cultures that are not represented in her classroom. It is clear that she values reflecting over one’s own culture, but not whether she finds it important to compare it to other cultures.
4.3. Interpretations of Interculturality

In this final section, the teachers’ interpretations of the term interculturality will be analysed. The quotes presented in this section are the teachers’ answers to the question “What does the concept interculturality mean to you?” Their answers will be connected to Byram’s five savoirs (Byram et al. 2002) and Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile.

TA spoke of the term in connection to the school community and how interculturality relates to the IB learners profile: “being open-minded, being reflective, being critical and showing empathy for others” (TA). He explained that these attitudes among others are encouraged every day in his teaching, and that one goal is to embrace the similarities within the school community.

I guess I’d probably say it’d be the, almost the culture that we have in this school so like the culture that we build up in the school. [Pause] Yeah I guess the different parts of culture that we kind of embrace and use in this school particularly

(TA)

As previously mentioned, TA’s description of his teaching can be related to three out of five of Byram’s (1997) savoirs. In connection to Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile, TA’s interpretation of interculturality and description of his teaching corresponds to several of the aspects in Sercu’s (2006) profile. Out of the ten points in the list, TA fulfils eight. The two that we cannot say that he fulfils is whether he is able to develop tasks, materials and content that promote interculturality and whether he addresses students’ stereotypes in the FL-classroom. However, we cannot say that he absolutely does not fulfil these points since we base our analysis on one single interview. The same applies to the other eight points, we cannot guarantee that he fulfils these every single day, but at least once in the interview he expressed such an approach. Two of the points in the list were achieved during the unit on cultures, described above. The unit enabled discussions on differences and similarities between cultures. This taught the students to change perspective on their own culture (Sercu 2006). Because of TA’s school setting, he has contacts with foreign cultures every day in various forms. Even though he might not yet have a deep knowledge of all cultures, working with people from all over the world enables him to develop this further.
When asked about interculturality, TB’s answer focused on embracing different cultural identities:

I mean, I connect this to the fact that I hope that my students one day will be able to feel intercultural. That they can feel comfortable in the Swedish society, but still feel completely okay and content with their own cultural identity. To our students, the Swedish culture is very different most of the time, so to me it’s about having, belonging to different groups, that you belong to different cultures and different sub-groups and that that is okay. You can belong to many different cultures, and it doesn’t matter. You can be in different situations and so on…

(TB, our translation)

However, TB herself stated that she does not encourage her students to share their cultural backgrounds. Because of this, she automatically does not fulfil many of the points in Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile. The one point that she does fulfil is the first that concerns knowledge of the foreign cultures she teaches, and having contacts with these often and in various forms. This because she herself estimates that she has spent almost ten years abroad in different places around the world, and still has contacts with people from many different cultures regularly. The main reasons why she does not fulfil any of the other points is the lack of cultural sharing in her classroom which leads to not fulfilling any of the five savoirs, her using materials that according to herself has been heavily criticised, and the fact that she thinks that “there are other more important things” (TB) than culture (Sercu 2006).

TC’s interpretation of the term touch upon differences and similarities within the community:

A context for everyone, one could say. That we are all one group and that everyone is different, but we can find common factors

(TC, our translation)

When asked about the term interculturality and how it is discussed at the school, TC quickly changed the subject to developing a peaceful study environment where the students can focus on their Swedish language development. According to her, the school’s main focus is to develop the students’ knowledge of Swedish. She explained that the reason behind this focus is the cultural diversity at her school. When it comes to Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile, it is difficult to determine how
many points she fulfils, because she clearly discusses using her students’ cultural backgrounds in her teaching but it is unclear whether she teaches them to change perspective and relate to other cultures. She did mention several times that she enjoys finding new approaches to language teaching and that she uses and adjusts her material to achieve her goals. However she did not specify whether these goals are connected to IC and Byram’s (1997) five savoirs.

The one teacher that stated that she did not know what the term interculturality means was TD:

TD: Not a damn thing because I don’t know what it means. Intercult…
S: What do you connect it to then?
TD: Say it again
S: Interculturality
TD: I probably learned that at the University [paus] No… What does it mean?

(Our translation)

In order to be able to continue the interview regarding interculturality, we made the decision to provide the teacher with a brief definition of the term:

Being open to other cultures and looking upon other cultures with empathy, and viewing your own culture from and outside perspective. Keeping an open mind to your own and other cultures. Sort of parallel

(S, our translation)

Despite being provided with this definition, TD focused on integration and possible problems connected to this and to cultures. She explained that there is now an equal amount of Swedish and immigrant students at her school and that you now hear Arabic being spoken all around the school, which has made her react. She expressed that it is difficult to separate culture and religion which leads to racist opinions being expressed in discussions in the classroom. She stated that these opinions frightened her. However she herself explained that the students from Syria are “very very sensitive” (TD) and that it is in their “culture to fight, you hit first and ask questions later” (TD).

TD does not fulfil any of the points in Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile. She does not make use of her students’ cultural backgrounds, she does not apply Byram’s (1997) five savoirs to her teaching, and mainly focuses on British and
American culture. TD explained that her students sometimes express prejudice opinions towards certain cultures and religions, and that she finds this upsetting. However, she herself has expressed prejudice opinions several times during the interview, but it is unclear if she is aware of this.

TE admitted to not using the term interculturality, but after reflecting over the word, he provided the following definition:

It’s not a term that I’ve ever used [laugh] But “inter”… It’s a question of culture meetings and that you can see similarities and affirm similarities and differences between different cultures and find… Yes, in that case it would be that you look for similarities so that you can understand that we all have the same origin. That the thought behind a way of expressing oneself is really the same thought, it would be that

(TE, our translation)

TE is aware of the need of discussing differences and similarities between one’s own culture and others’ in order to develop his students’ IC. In TE’s classroom, the cultural experiences are very similar, which makes it difficult to discuss differences within the class. With such a homogenous group as a starting point, it might be difficult to fulfil some of the points of Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile list. This one interview with TE does not reveal if he teaches his students to change the perspective on their own culture, if he addresses the students’ stereotypes and if he makes use of students’ perception on foreign culture when planning his teaching (Sercu 2006). He expressed a broader view of culture and a willingness to incorporate other cultures than British and American into his teaching. During the interview he spoke mainly about “Capital-C culture” which makes it difficult for us to analyse his use of “Small-c culture” and IC in his teaching (Larzén 2005).
5. Concluding discussion

With this study we set out to investigate teachers’ interpretations and understanding, consciously or unconsciously, of the term interculturality. Our research question was “How can interculturality be interpreted by EFL-teachers in years 4-6?” A funnel approach in our interviews enabled us to investigate the teachers’ view of culture in EFL-teaching and how this relates to their interpretations of interculturality (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). We interviewed five teachers from different schools and settings in order to find five different examples of how this term can be interpreted.

Byram’s (1997) five savoirs, Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile, and the categories “Capital-C culture” and “Small-c culture” (Kramsch 2013; Larzén 2005) provided us with the tools to analyse our results.

Our findings suggest that when it comes to encouraging cultural diversity, TA who works at an international IB school was the only one who clearly stated that it is in his school’s mission statement to encourage and embrace all nationalities and cultures. This view is, and has to be, incorporated in his everyday teaching. The other three teachers who spoke about cultural policies all stated that they do not have any at their schools. TD referred to lack of knowledge within the staff when she explained why they do not encourage cultural sharing more at her school. TE stated that he does encourage his students to share their cultural backgrounds, but since his class is so homogenous there are limitations to the cultural differences being shared. TB confessed to not encouraging her students to share their cultural backgrounds, but at the same time she emphasised how important cultural awareness is at such a diverse school as hers.

With regards to interculturality in the teaching of culture, TA’s unit of inquiry on culture and his overall approach to cultural sharing enables him to fulfil many of the aspects of Byram’s (1997) five savoirs. TC and TD both referred to English as a global language, which involves many different cultures. However, it is difficult to assess how intercultural their teaching of English is, due to lack of information on how their teaching is constructed. Both TB and TD discussed culture in the traditional sense, as factual knowledge being taught through the TL and with a focus on only Britain, America and sometimes Australia (Gagnestam 2005). Regarding the two categories within culture, the majority of our respondents seem to focus on “Capital-C culture” which corresponds to
Kramsch’s (2013) statement that this category has been emphasised by schools traditionally.

Our findings on teachers’ interpretations of interculturality were based on teachers’ definitions of the term and the descriptions of their views on culture in EFL-teaching. These were then connected to Byram’s (1997) IC-savoirs and Sercu’s (2006) IC-teacher profile list. TA fulfils most of the points on Sercu’s list, however the other teachers hardly fulfil any. Some of the reasons for this are that the teachers did not encourage cultural sharing in the classroom or that we lacked information concerning their teaching. Sercu’s long and detailed list, including all aspects of intercultural teaching, seems to be practically impossible to fulfil in its entirety.

In answer to our question about interculturality, and our research question, all teachers expressed an uncertainty about the definition. One clearly stated that she had no idea, and another that it is not a term that he had ever used. However, not being able to define the term correctly did not necessarily mean that they did not incorporate intercultural aspects into their teaching.

We believe that this degree project is relevant for principals, teachers, and teacher students. The findings in this study show different ways of approaching cultural aspects of EFL-teaching, including different amounts of intercultural aspects. Besides providing the reader with a theoretical background including definitions of interculturality and how it is connected to the Swedish national curriculum (Skolverket 2011a), it also provides examples of teachers’ understanding of the term interculturality. Aspects of the term is included in the fundamental values and syllabus for English in the curriculum, and specified in the commentary material for the syllabus for English (Skolverket 2011a; Skolverket 2011b). This means that having an intercultural approach to EFL-teaching is not voluntary and in order to raise teachers’ awareness on this, it is necessary to investigate examples of how it is approached in schools today.

We are aware of the limitations of this study. Our results are not generalizable, and this was not our intention. We have conducted five interviews with five different teachers; had we done more than one interview per person, some uncertainties could have been avoided. It has not been possible for us to contact our respondents for follow-up questions because of the time frame.

We suggest that more research should be done in the field of interculturality and EFL-teaching. One suggestion is to investigate how some international schools and some Swedish municipal schools work with culture and interculturality, and whether it would
be possible to compare and share their methods in order to further develop the incorporation of interculturality into schools. Another suggestion is to compare schools that follow the IB curriculum with schools that follow the Swedish curriculum and investigate if the curriculum influences how the schools incorporate intercultural approaches in their teaching.
References


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Appendix 1

Letter to possible respondents:

Hej!
Vi är två studenter som läser sista terminen på grundlärarutbildningen (inriktning 4-6) vid Malmö högskola. Vi skriver just nu ett examensarbete som handlar om kultur i engelskundervisningen. Vi letar efter mellanstadielärare i engelska som kan tänka sig att ställa upp på en intervju angående just kultur och hur de ser på kultur i just engelskundervisningen.

Vi skickar detta mail till dig för att fråga om du själv arbetar som engelsklärare i årskurs 4, 5 eller 6, eller om du känner någon annan som gör det?
Kan du tänka dig att ställa upp på att bli intervjuad angående detta?
Om du känner någon annan som arbetar med detta, har du möjlighet att skicka oss kontaktuppgifter till denna person eller vidarebefordra detta mail?

Intervjuerna kommer att ta max 40 minuter och vi anpassar oss helt efter dig när det gäller tid och plats.

Tacksam för all hjälp vi kan få med detta!

Mvh,
Sarah Andersson & Mathilda Brandin
Appendix 2

Pre-interview information:

- This interview is a part of our degree project and will only be used for that purpose
- The interview will be recorded, but the recording will be deleted as soon as we are done with the transcribing
- All information about you and the school will be anonymised
- You can terminate the interview at any time
- You do not have to answer all questions
- If you want to, we can send you our degree project when it has been approved and published
Appendix 3

Background information:

Name and age:
Namn och ålder:

What is your educational background? Where were you educated?
Vad har du för utbildningsbakgrund? Var utbildades du?

How much teaching experience do you have? Where have you worked?
Hur länge har du arbetat som lärare? Var har du arbetat?

How much time have you spent abroad? Where and what types of stay? How do you think this has affected your English?
Hur mycket tid har du spenderat utomlands? Var och vilken typ av vistelse var det? Hur tror du att det har påverkat dina engelskakunskaper?

Do you use English in your spare time? How?
Använder du engelska på fritiden? Hur?

Do you have any other direct contacts with the English language among family or friends?
Har du några andra kontakter med det engelska språket i din familj eller bland dina vänner?

About your class/your teaching:

How many students do you have who do not have Swedish as their first language? How many religions are represented in your classroom? Which ones? How many languages are represented in your classroom?
Hur många elever har du som inte har svenska som förstaspråk? Hur många religioner finns representerade i ditt klassrum? Vilka? Hur många språk finns representerade i ditt klassrum?

Do you encourage your students to share their cultural background/customs, and if so, how? Uppmuntrar du dina elever att dela med sig av sin kulturella bakgrund/traditioner, och i så fall hur?

What is the most important goal for your teaching of English? Vad är det viktigaste målet för dig när det gäller engelskundervisningen?

What is, in your opinion, “culture” in the teaching of English? What should be taught? Vad är, enligt dig, “kultur” i engelskundervisning? Vad ska läras ut?

What is your goal as far as culture teaching is concerned? Vad är ditt mål när det gäller kultur i engelskundervisningen?

Do you assess the students’ knowledge of culture, if so, how? Bedömer du dina elevers kunskaper om kultur, hur i så fall?

What do you do in the English classroom with regards to culture? Hur jobbar du i engelskklassrummet med kultur?

What material do you use in your English lessons? How important is the material with regards to culture? Vilket material använder du på dina engelsklektioner? Hur viktigt är materialet när det gäller kultur?

What knowledge do your students have about culture from before? Where does this come from? Vilken kunskap har dina elever om kultur sedan tidigare? Var kommer den kunskapen från?
How do you make use of this in your teaching?
Hur använder du dig av deras förkunskaper i din undervisning?

What does the concept “interculturality” mean to you?
Vad betyder begreppet interkulturalitet för dig?

Do you discuss interculturality at your school? In what context and with whom?
Diskuterar ni interkulturalitet på din skola? I vilket sammanhang och med vem?

Do you have any specific policies at your school when it comes to culture and interculturality?
Har ni någon policy på din skola när det gäller kultur och interkulturalitet?