Degree Project
English Studies in Education
15 Credits, First Cycle

English Speaking Cultures in Middle School Reading Material

Det engelskspråkiga kulturerna i mellanstadiets läsmaterial

Rasmus Dalquist

Grundlärarexamen med inriktning mot åk 4-6, 240 hp
23 Mars 2018.

Examiner: Shannon Sauro
Supervisor: Damian Finnegan
Abstract

This study is an attempt to discuss and reflect over which cultures that are present in the reading material in the English language education in the years four to six at in a school outside of Malmö. The concept of culture is discussed from an educational perspective. The cultures present in the learners reading material and the teachers perspective on foreign cultures is also discoursed. Relevant previous research is highlighted and used to examine the collected material. The data is collected from interviews with three middle school teachers and from an analysis of the reading material that is used in the English education. The results reveal that British or American culture is heavily over-represented. The three teacher’s education is based almost solely on the textbook and therefore the textbook is given great mandate on which cultures that are present in the classroom. The results led to the argumentation that the English education in Sweden ought to be challenged. The endonormative perspective that places a clear emphasize on the native speaking norm, and revolves around inner circle cultures in the English classroom does not suffice as a foundation for our young learners. To solely focus on an English or American context will not prepare our pupils for the global challenges that lies ahead. English as an international language is spoken in all the corners of the world and all these corners ought to be invited into our classroom.
# Table of Content

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 4  
Purpose ............................................................................................................................................ 6  
Research Questions ............................................................................................................................ 6  
Literature Review ............................................................................................................................... 7  
  Interpretations of Culture .................................................................................................................. 7  
  English as an International Language .............................................................................................. 8  
  Interculturality in the Classroom ...................................................................................................... 10  
  Endonormative or Exonormative Perspectives ................................................................................ 12  
  Aspects of Selecting Learning Material ........................................................................................... 13  
Method ............................................................................................................................................... 13  
  The Participating Teachers .............................................................................................................. 13  
  The Interviews ................................................................................................................................. 14  
  The Structure of the Interviews ....................................................................................................... 15  
  Ethical Considerations ..................................................................................................................... 15  
  Reading Materials ............................................................................................................................ 16  
Results ............................................................................................................................................. 17  
  The Teachers Background .............................................................................................................. 17  
  The Teachers Perception of the Reading Material ......................................................................... 18  
  The Perception of Foreign Cultures in the Classroom .................................................................... 20  
  Cultures in the Reading Material .................................................................................................... 22  
  Grade Four ...................................................................................................................................... 22  
  Grade Five ...................................................................................................................................... 23  
  Grade Six ........................................................................................................................................ 23  
  Textbook Summary ......................................................................................................................... 24  
  The Stories Present in the Textbook ............................................................................................... 24  
  Grade Four ...................................................................................................................................... 25  
  Grade Five ...................................................................................................................................... 25  
  Grade Six ........................................................................................................................................ 25  
  Short Stories Summary .................................................................................................................... 26  
Discussion ......................................................................................................................................... 27
Foreign Cultures in the Reading Material ................................................................. 28
Dominating Cultures in the Reading Material ............................................................ 30
The Teacher Perspective .............................................................................................. 33
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 35
Limitations of the Study ............................................................................................. 36
Further Research ......................................................................................................... 36
References .................................................................................................................. 38
Appendices .................................................................................................................. 40
Introduction

Why do we act in a certain way in Sweden? Why does another culture act differently? In the global world of today, I consider that we, as teachers, ought to strive for an education that focuses on the relationship between different cultures. At my teacher-training-in-the field (VFU) school I have observed several English lessons, at the grade four to six, and my overall perception is that the learners are not presented with enough perspective of culture. They rarely acquire the opportunities to reflect over foreign cultures. The texts visual, too me, in the education where focused around an English native-speaking norm. The chapters were about English breakfast or other traditional native speaker phenomena. Little or none reflection or comparison where made to the learners own experience and the purpose of the reading material was solely to present knew linguistic knowledge to the learners. Therefore, we, as educators, ought to place emphasize on making our learners’ aware of their own cultural heritage to create a situation in which they may reflect on the outside world. McKay (2002) states that the students need to reflect on their own culture to be able to examine and relate to other cultures properly, and that the emphasis should always be on the diversity within all cultures (p.100).

The multicultural Sweden of today presents a pallet of cultures for us to relate to. Lundahl (2014) points to the danger off connecting too much of an immigrant learners cultural background to his or her behavior. That student stands the risk of being identified as “the other” (p.68). We should avoid a stereotypical approach to culture, because it only restricts the learners’ concept of what an unknown, foreign culture might be. Pupils should be given a broad picture of what constitutes being a citizen of the English-speaking world today. One can argue that it is more likely, for them as Swedes, to one day interact with a German or a Chinese in English, than an actual native speaker. Consequently, it is not reasonable to only learn about the cultures of the traditional English-speaking countries in the world. We as teachers must avoid placing people in fixed categories and not see other cultures as “us” and “them”. That applies not only to the comparison between global cultures but to the classroom itself.
The Swedish National Curriculum for English\(^1\) (2011) stipulates that “Teaching should encourage pupils to develop an interest in languages and culture, and convey the benefits of language skills and knowledge” (p.32). To present the world and its different cultures through the reading of books and stories is one way of visualizing the surrounding world to the students. SNCE (2011) also states that “In order to deal with spoken language and texts, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop their skills in relating content to their own experiences, living conditions and interest” (p.32). The experience acquired during practice at my VFU school indicates that the reading material presented to the learners in English class does not encourage or inspire their interest in foreign cultures.

Culture is all around us, in the way we speak, how we think, what we choose to eat and how. In our Swedish schools, there has been a predominate way of addressing cultures in English teaching. Lundahl (2014) points to the traditional view of culture in language learning and its focus on culture as being linked with nations, and the products and facts of that nation. With this focus the language learning will revolve around a product-based view of culture, in which countries that have English as the first language tend to be the priority (p.67). But to teach children that in Australia there are kangaroos, and that Americans like baseball is not sufficient. Nations and their cultures are not stable, fixed entities; they evolve through interactions with other cultures. To teach culture in language learning today ought to be so much more than solely information and facts about other cultures than our own. McKay (2009) lifts three aspects of culture that I think are interesting. “…culture involves three fundamental aspects of human experience: what people do (cultural behavior), what people know (cultural knowledge), and what things people make and use (cultural artifacts).” (p.82). It is in the human relation and in the interaction, and encounters between people that the most interesting parts of culture occur.

According to the Swedish National Curriculum for English, “Teaching in English should essentially give pupils 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” (SNCE, 2011, p.32).

---

\(^1\) The Swedish National Curriculum for English - SNCE
A fundamental part of this paragraph from the curriculum is that we should present opportunities and situations in which our students can reflect over living conditions, cultures and contexts where English is being used. English today is a global language, and to solely focus on cultures that have English as their first language is an incorrect interpretation of the syllabus. English is being used in all the corners of the world; therefore, all the corners of the world should also be present and welcome in our English classroom.

**Purpose**

The aim of this study is to investigate how different cultures are presented in reading materials in the English classroom at my VFU-school. A focus will be on visualizing the cultures that dominate the learners’ environment. Further, I will investigate perception of three teachers regarding culture in language learning and how and why they integrate it in the English subject.

**Research Questions**

- How are foreign cultures presented in the reading material in the English classroom?

- Which cultures dominate the reading material that is presented to the learners?

- How do the teachers perceive their practise of presenting foreign cultures to the learners?
Literature Review

This part will address certain key terms that will be used in this study. The concepts and key terms will be unpacked and described and previous research that is of interest will be lifted. These concepts will be employed when I later discuss the empirical data that I have collected.

Interpretations of Culture

Much of the focus of this study is located around the concept of culture. The conception of culture that is relevant for this research constitutes not only the things and phenomena that are traditionally connected to the word culture. It is not only a certain country or what food they might eat there that is of interest.

According to Geertz (1973), it is the through actions and in artefacts that people create social meaning and find ways of understanding and interpreting of their surroundings. These surroundings form larger structures of meaning which connect the everyday life of its participants. Culture exists as a thought model of different values and meanings which are socially produced. We as humans not only create these models but are also bound by them. It is a symbiosis that requires our participation (p.5). Geertz (1973) argues that we as humans exist as creative subjects within a culture and that we are essentially aware of the meaning of our actions. Culture is ever present in all contexts where humans think, feel, communicate and function in general (p.89). However, as Nieto (1999) argues, we as teachers must avoid placing to much value when addressing cultures and that culture can be a problematic issue because “…it can mean different things to different people in different contexts” (p.47).

Geertz (1973) perceives us humans as opinion-seeking beings that try to be susceptible to others. We make sense by relating to symbols and actions of others members of our culture. In general, cultures are essential for all human existence (p.89). Nieto (1999) views culture as a hybrid in which peoples’ choices define which certain elements that are suitable and desirable for that person in the specific context (p.50). In the SNCE (2011), it is clear that our learners are to reflect over living conditions and cultural phenomena where English is being used (p.32). McKay (2009) argues for cross-cultural encounters when approaching foreign cultures in school,
and that it is “…beneficial for learners to be asked to reflect in their own culture in relation to others” (p.83). The choices that we make, consciously or unconsciously, ought to be visible among our students and in our classroom to reassure that our learners are aware of their own cultural belonging before they set out to reflect over the living conditions of others.

Culture is constructed and formed by the members who feel attached to that culture. It is connected and influenced by the people who surround it and are a part of it. Therefore, certain interests of groups or individuals of that specific culture are always embedded in the context. Nieto (1999) states that culture is always linked to a certain context that is influenced by political, economic and historical conditions (p.53): “It exists not in isolation but through concrete relationships characterized by differential access to power. As a result, dominant social groups in a society often determines what counts as culture” (ibid). To be aware of the aspect of power and to recognize the actors that dominate the discussion about culture is a method of moving away from a stereotypical approach of culture. Lundahl (2014) argues that stereotypes, to a degree, are a normal way of making sense of a complex world. However, when we address individuals of a specific culture, we should always avoid seeing them as representatives of a certain category. We should move away from placing too much emphasis on the difference between cultures and place more emphasize on the many similarities that may exists between different cultures (p.69-70). According to Nieto (1999), most people seldom think about their own culture: “It is not consciously taught, or consciously learned…“In fact, most people do not even think about their culture unless it is in a subordinate position to another culture – if they belong to a majority culture – when they leave the confines of home and are no longer part of the cultural norm” (ibid).

**English as an International Language**

According to McKay (2009), one must view the English language as an international language. The primary function of English today is to serve as a means of communication between different cultures and to allow them to share and exchange ideas and beliefs through language. With this approach, one moves away from viewing English as a language solely connected to the cultures of countries like England or the USA (p.81). If one desires to move away from viewing English as something concerning only native speakers and to broaden the view, one can discuss
the matter using Kachru´s model of three circles, which defines different levels within the English language. The model contains the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. The inner circle is where English language is considered to be the first language (e.g. USA, UK, Ireland, etc.) (McKay, 2009, p.10). According to Bruthiaux (2003), a characteristic of the inner circle countries is that they are largely endonormative, “…that is, they find within themselves the norms of correctness and appropriateness to be propagated through language education and language planning” (p.160). This can be contrasted to the situation in the outer circle (e.g. India, the Philippines, Singapore), where, as McKay (2009) argues, the English language has spread as a result of colonization by English speaking countries. Even though the colonies acquired their independence, the predominant language in many of these countries continued to be English. (ibid).

Figure 1: Kachru´s model of inner-, outer-, and expanding circle countries (stats in circles from, Crystal, 1997, p.54).

One finds Sweden in the expanding circle, and we, like many other countries (e.g. China, Japan, Germany) in the expanding circle have acquired our knowledge of English through school. The language is not taught from generation to generation but is a result of the determination from politicians and society, in general, that English is important to acquire (Bruthiaux, 2003, p.160). McKay (2009) argues that we need to consider English as an international language because of
the sheer number of people that are somewhat acquainted with English in the expanding circle. We ought to start viewing the English language from a global perspective. This could lead to greater variation in the purposes of the language (p.13). Bruthiaux (2003) directs some criticism towards Kachru’s circles and argues that the “…model is at fault in that it makes no reference to proficiency and does not attempt to differentiate between degrees of communicative competence” (p.169). One could easily find vast differences between the approach towards the English language in, for example, Italy and Sweden. However, as is stated by McKay (2009), it is undoubtable “…in the Expanding Circle where there is the greatest potential for continued spread of English” (p.11).

**Interculturality in the Classroom**

Sercu (2006) argues that there has been a shift in language learning and that the main objective of learning English today is not focused solely on acquiring communicative abilities. We as teachers are obliged, besides teaching linguistics tasks and skills, to teach intercultural competence to our students (p.55). McKay (2009) argues that we ought to build a sphere of interculturality in which students and teachers can operate and reflect over the things they encounter:

> Establishing a ´sphere of interculturality: this line of thought promotes the idea that the learning of culture is more than just the transfer of information between cultures. Rather, learning about a culture requires that an individual considers his or her own culture in relation to another. Hence, the process of learning about another culture entails a reflection on one’s own culture as well as the target culture. (p.82-83)

The aspect of interculturality places additional pressure on the teachers to present an education that not only addresses the linguistic aspects of language learning but also focuses on interculturality as an ability. Sercu (2006) states that to develop the students’ intercultural competence the teacher ought to know not only his or her own culture but also have sufficient knowledge about the target culture in focus. To be able to discuss and reflect the teacher should have general knowledge about the cultures that allow a usable comparison with both differences and similarities between the cultures. Moreover, the teacher should be aware of
any stereotypes that could exist within the classroom and adjust the methods of teaching and select content that challenges any stereotypes the learners may possess (p.57). The aim ought to be to encourage the learners to reflect on certain behaviour that can be found in a foreign culture and then “…consider what meaning particular behaviour might have for members of that culture, and not assume that it is the same as the one they have” (McKay, 2009, p.83).

However, Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) argue that when teachers and schools plan English courses the decisions concerning what texts and what subjects to include are often made hastily and without any particular deliberation. The choices are made based on prior practices and old routines, instead of being based on students’ needs and interests (p.17). Moreover, Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) claim that a major issue with the approach of today is that an emphasis is placed on the Anglo-Saxon world solely, because that is the way it has always been: “The selection of an instructional variety should be made locally and individually, taking various contextual factors into consideration, including learning goals, the teacher’s background, local attitudes toward English(es) and the availability of didactic materials” (p.23). Prodromou (1988) also argues that the reading material in English language teaching (ELT) are stubbornly Anglo-centric and that the content of the text books focuses mainly on situations that rarely connect to real life. Furthermore, the content is mostly dominated by an idealistic society where the traditional heteronormative family is the norm (p.76-79). According to McKay (2009), many teachers perceive that learners will be more motivated to learn English “…if the language is presented in contexts that relate to their own lives as young adults rather than to see it presented in the context of an English-speaking country” (p.87).

Sercu (2006), who also advocates an adaptation to the learners needs and interest when selecting teaching materials for ELT, lifts another interesting aspect of selecting material. Teachers, when choosing materials, ought to consider if and how that material encourages the learners to develop their intercultural competence (p.58). Furthermore, Sercus’ (2006) research argues how teachers are willing to adapt their ELT to an intercultural approach, and the main reason for this willingness is that the teachers acknowledge the challenges of adaptability that lies ahead for our young learners in the multicultural world of today. Even though there is a teacher ambition to construct an education that revolves around interculturality, the teachers in Sercus’ studies highlight how the content in the English textbook promotes an education that solely approaches
foreign cultures in the traditional sense. The intercultural approach, as is mentioned above, is absent (p.68).

Endonormative or Exonormative Perspectives

If one desires to move away from the Anglo-Saxon paradigm of ELT, one must challenge the norm that places British or North-American English as the superior practices of English. There are other ways of approaching English, especially in the outer circle, where the potential for developing different aspects of English is greater. Hino (2012) discusses ELT from a Japanese perspective and advocates that the expanding circle countries should move away from the exonormative perspective that places much emphasize on mirroring the British or American varieties of English. Hino does not imply that expanding circle countries like Japan or Sweden should form a national variety of English, but rather he presents a pedagogical alternative that broadens the educational approach and presents additional versions of English for learners who might find themselves communicating in an international environment (p.28). To be able to do this, Kubota (2012) argues that we must challenge the paradigm that places British or American English as the linguistic norm. Our students should not only be aware of the different varieties of English that are present in the world today but also which political, social, cultural and historical developments that created that particular context (p.56). Hino (2012) places emphasize on how Japanese students traditionally have tried to copy native speakers of English. The move away from the endonormative perspective in ELT presents an opportunity for the learners to reflect on their own version of English and on how that style can develop effectively to better the international communication in English (p.29).

Normative assumptions of what is to be considered proper English ought to be challenged, and Hino (2012) argues that expanding circle countries can create pedagogical methods that draw upon the experiences and conditions that exist within their own classroom: “This approach will enable us to stop committing the mistake of forcing native-speaker norms on our students and will empower the learners with vital tools to effectively express themselves in this age of globalization” (p.41). To appropriate this perspective in ELT increases the demand on both teachers and students. Kubota (2012) states that we ought to help our learners to raise their awareness and critical thinking about the distribution of influence over the English language.
There should always be a constant questioning of linguistic norms, and the student’s reflective abilities ought to be developed alongside their communicative skills. A critical and reflective approach would better respond to the multicultural communities that is constantly developing both domestically and abroad (p.67).

Aspects of Selecting Learning Material

The critical and reflective approach, mentioned above, should also be present when teachers and students discuss the reading materials that are present in the classroom. Both the cultural and linguistic norms should be challenged critically, and McKay (2009) highlights three aspects of what we teachers ought to have in mind when choosing materials to work with when we address culture in teaching English as an international language:

- the material should be used in such a way that the students are encouraged to reflect on their own culture in relation to others, thus helping to establish a sphere of interculturality
- the diversity that exist within all cultures should be emphasized
- cultural content should be critically examined so that students consider what assumptions are present in the text and in what other ways the topic could be discussed. (McKay, 2009, p.100)

Method

In this part I will present the methodology of this degree project and the different aspects that have been taking under consideration when collection the research material. The material for this study is collected by qualitative interviews.

The Participating Teachers

One part of this study will focus on interviewing three teachers about their perception of the cultures that are present in their English classrooms. Because of the time limitations, only three teachers will be included. If the framework would allow it, more teachers would have been
included to broaden the perspectives further. To anonymise the teachers, their real names have been changed to fictive ones. The major criterion when finding subjects to interview was that the teachers should work as middle school English teachers. An initial approach was made to two teachers; but because one of the teachers were rather unexperienced in teaching English at this level, an additional teacher was added. This one has greater experience in teaching English in grades 4-6.

The first teacher, “Sara”, teaches English in several different classes in grades five to six. The second teacher, the more unexperienced one, “Anna” has English with the sixth grade. Finally, the third teacher, the one with more experience, “Martin”, has English with students in the fourth and fifth grade. This study is the first time I met Anna, but I knew Sara and Martin from earlier. Before I commenced the interviews, I asked if the teachers wanted to do the interviews in Swedish or English. This was done because I desired a conversation in which the teachers felt comfortable and could speak with ease. The focus was on what they had to say on the matter and not in which language they said it. All teachers preferred Swedish, so any quotation that may occur later in the text is translated to English by me.

The Interviews

All the interviews were carried out at the school where the teachers work. A conference room served as interview room, because this allowed us to talk uninterrupted. Because the participants are teachers at the school, there could be disturbances from students and other colleagues if we were to conduct the interviews in a regular classroom. All the interviews where recorded, in Swedish and transcribed for later analysis. However, some parts were excluded as they had no relevance to the study. Further, onomatopoetic words were excluded based on the same argument as above, that they lacked relevance. Nonetheless, if certain sounds that could have been of importance, like “a heavy sigh” occurred, I would have included them. The teachers were informed about how the recordings would be used and gave their written consent. The interviews where recorded because if one takes notes, instead of recording the interviews, the risk is that the data collected will be centred around what the interviewer heard instead of what was actually said (Alvehus, 2013, p.85). The length of the interviews where roughly thirty minutes per interview.
The Structure of the Interviews

Before the interviews commenced, I revealed none, or little information about the planned subject. This was because I wanted the interview to be based on the participants’ current perception of culture in language learning. It is also important that I, as the interviewer, do not reveal too much of my own opinion. Trost (2005) points to this aspect and states that it is not that the interviewer necessarily ought to hide his/her opinion, but that he/she does not openly need to reveal it either (p.57). Another aspect that I took into consideration is discussed by Alvehus (2013): the interview should not be a test. The atmosphere of the interview should in no way force the person interviewed to feel obligated to perform in any way (p.83).

Trost (2005) talks about high and low standardization in interviews and the ambition was to create an atmosphere characterized by low standardization, that is, where the interviewee is allowed to control, to a greater extent, what language to use and where I as interviewer adjust the order of the questions so they are based on the responses from the interviewee (p.19). The goal was to create a conversation where the low degree of standardization would lead to greater variety in the answers. The questionnaire (see appendices) for the interviews were characterized by open questions and they were carefully selected with the aim of possibly offering varied answers that could be analysed. Alvehus (2013) points to interviews and states that they are a way of finding out what another person thinks and feels about a certain subject (p.81). With this in mind, the questions where constructed to investigate what perception the teachers had about the cultures that are presented in their education and how they are incorporation with the language learning.

Ethical Considerations

When one sets out to interview people that are of interest to one’s research, some ethical principles needs to be followed. Vetenskapsrådet (2002) stipulates that a researcher ought to ensure a basic individual protection for those participating in the study. There are four key requirements that must be followed: the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement and the utility requirement.
In the information requirement, the researchers are to inform the participants of the purpose of the research conducted. Even though my initial approach was to hide my research intentions in order to perhaps acquire more objective answers from the teachers, the essential aim of the study was revealed after the interviews. The consent requirement stipulates that the interviewees can cease the participation at any time, and all three teachers were informed that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they were entitled to decide under which conditions they will participate and that they could independently decide on how long the interview would last. The confidentiality requirement says that the details of all persons included in the study must be given the highest conceivable confidentiality. All personal data that will be collected is to be kept in a way that ensures that unauthorized persons cannot access the data. All three teachers where informed of this and their anonymity was kept consistent throughout the study. The data collected must be recorded, stored and deleted in a way that secures the individuals personal integrity and the interviewees where informed of the procedure. The final requirement, the utility requirement, states that the data collected is to be used for research purposes only. Information about individuals that the researcher collects should stay with the researchers and not be lent or used by other scientific actors (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002, p.6-15).

Reading Materials

Besides the interviews, this study also investigated the learners’ reading material and investigate which cultures that are represented in these texts. Some basic research criteria ought to be considered in order to secure a certain validity in the collected material. Brinkkjaer and Höyen (2013) emphasize that a researcher needs to investigate a material with a systematic approach, which means that the researcher reflects on the entire process of investigation. The study must be characterized by a consistency that principally gives the researcher the same type of result even though he or she changes research material (p.104). This means that the ambition with this study is to systematically investigate the learners’ reading materials, and the aim is to keep a high consistency when collecting data. I will approach all the different materials in the same matter.

When examining the reading material, I will note the authors of the texts to see from which type of cultural background the author comes from. Even though the author might be from Sweden, his or her cultural belonging might be in a tradition that advocates a conservative view of what
stipulates an English-speaking culture. Their beliefs might be that the greatest way of acquiring English as foreign learner is to focus on native speaking countries and to mimic their English. Even though this might be hard to visualise, the ambition is to investigate this angle.

Furthermore, when examining the learners reading material, I will note which cultures that are highlighted and presented. For example, when looking at their textbook, I will write down which cultures that are presented in the different chapters and how many times a certain culture appears. Kachru’s model of inner-, outer-, and expanding circle countries (Crystal, 1997, p.54) will be used to categorize which cultures and nations that are predominant in the texts. These circles will be addressed further in the literary review.

The systematic approach is to ensure that I stay clear of subjective points of view and that my preconceptions of the quality of their reading material is erased (Brinkkjaer & Höyen, 2013, p.107). The focus is on collecting data that can be discussed and investigated with an objective approach.

**Results**

In this part of the study, I will present the results found in both the interviews conducted with the three teachers and the analysis of the reading material that is used in English education of their students. The data collected will be presented under different subheadings, and the aim is to present the result in relation to my research questions. As mentioned above, the teachers have been given fictitious names to simplify the reading. My opinion is that is easier to comprehend the content of a text if you can relate to names instead of “teacher 1” and “teacher 2”. The three teachers are, Sara, Anna and Martin.

**The Teachers Background**

Sara, has been a teacher for eleven years but has only taught middle-school leaners for four years. Before this, she worked as a preschool teacher. She teaches English for two fifth-grade classes and one sixth-grade class. Martin, has been teaching middle-school learners for thirty-one
years. He has been teaching English since he graduated in 1987. Presently, Martin teaches English in the fourth- and fifth-grade. Anna has done most of her teaching in primary school, and she has been a teacher for seven years. Even though Anna has merely taught English in middle-school less than a semester, her thoughts and reflection are of interest for this study. To investigate how she perceives the reading material and the cultures present, as a fairly new teacher in the subject, could add a different perspective and another layer than, perhaps a teacher with Martin’s experience cannot.

The Teachers Perception of the Reading Material

From the interviews, there was a clear indication, from all three teachers, that the textbook dominated in their classroom. Therefore, the reading material that their students encounter in the English classroom is predominantly based on the content of the textbook. The cultural perspectives and which of the three circles that are represented in ELT is therefore governed by the content in the textbook.

Sara, who says that she nowadays likes to move away from the textbook and move beyond the boundaries of the chapters in the book argues, that as a new teacher she was more dependent on the textbook: “When I was new, I took section by section, but now I have become safer in my role, so now I pick a little.” She emphasizes how she tries to connect the reading material in the textbooks to the learners’ interests. She tries not to follow the order of chapters, but to move more freely within the textbook, and she chooses those chapters that she finds relevant and interesting for the learners: “Some of them (chapters) I use to connect to their own reality, one could say. And then I make a little topic of it. Last year, there was a chapter called "High School Musical". Then they had to create and practice their own musical.”

Anna, similar to Sara and her approach when teaching as a novice on the subject, uses the textbook because “It feels safer”. When she first became acquainted with the textbook and the workbook, her initial response was “…Completely perfect! Workbook, textbook, glossary and answers.” However, her opinion has gradually change during her brief period as an English teacher: “Some (students) must really feel that this is really boring to work with this book, four times a week, and that is the case, they need something else too.” Moreover, Anna recognizes the
process of becoming a proficient English teacher is not something that happens overnight: “It feels a bit sad that you only start from this book. But that is something that I will tend to, and plan more later, and I will do it that with Sara, so she can help me a little. So the education can be a little more varied, and there can be some other tasks as well.”

Martin considers the textbook and the texts that can be found in it, and says that he: “...sometimes try to find easier fiction texts too, but it's not that easy”. The ready to use texts of the textbook provides comfort and ease in a busy schedule. The context in which English is being taught at this school follows, what I consider to be, a fairly traditional way of teaching English in Sweden. The class reads the text mutually, first aloud and then individually. They then move on to vocabulary and go through the new words of the chapter. The reading materials are almost exclusively selected from the textbook. Sara says that she has on occasion introduced song lyrics to use as reading material in her classroom. In particular, she uses popular songs that are well known by the students to make them reflect over the lyrical content of songs that they may otherwise take for granted: “I have worked a little with song lyrics, and that gets them interested. That song you listen to every day? Do you understand it? What it is about?” On the question of which countries, the songs are from, her answer is unequivocally: they are from “America or England”. When the ambition is to move away from the confines of the textbook the tendencies are still to focus on inner circle countries and follow their linguistic norm.

Like Sara, Martin moves freely within the textbook and picks chapters that he finds suitable. He states that the linguistic challenges are the most important when he considers what texts to use: “If it does not contain anything new grammatically, or if it does not contain anything that adds new glossary, then I think we might as well skip it and choose another text.” However, contrasting Sara, Martin does not recognize that the content ought to be connected to the learners’ interests: “The content does not matter, whether it is about football or going to the movies is not that important.”
The Perception of Foreign Cultures in the Classroom

It is clear that all three teachers, no matter experience rely heavy on the content of the textbook. Therefore, it is relevant to see how they perceive which cultures that are present in the textbook, and how they approach these foreign cultures with their learners. “What role does foreign cultures play in the English classroom, in particular the reading material for your students?”, was the initial question asked to the teachers about culture. Sara’s direct response was: “Far too little, unfortunately.” The frequent cultures are those present in the textbook and therefore: “England, America, Australia, those are the one we stick to. And even when we talk about them there is so more to those countries, you could do so much more with them.” Sara continues to discuss in which contexts foreign cultures are presented in her classroom and says that “It is often in the context of our own traditions, for example when we celebrate Easter we try to find out how they celebrate Easter in English speaking countries… It is only on such occasions, actually.” Martin has a different opinion than Sara and on the question, what role does foreign cultures play in the English classroom, he thinks that: “The book (textbook) that we use, addresses most of it. There is some about India, and Australia. It jumps around in the English speaking world.”

The concept of Kachru’s circles where intentionally withheld from the teachers and on how they perceived, if and how, the outer or expanding circle cultures where visible, the answers where similar. Sara responded, “Not at all! Or, they can be visible, but I must confess that it is something that we never tackled more thoroughly, ever.” However, she has considered broadening the perspectives and including more of the outer circle: “I have thought about it, for a task that you can do in English or Swedish…it's the "Bend it like Beckham". There are some cultural differences, she is an Indian girl who lives in England. But I have not done it yet, but I have thought about it.” Anna, with her short experience, has not thought about which cultures that she has encountered so far but “There has not been so much else, now that I think about it. There has been nothing outside them (England and USA).” Martin argues if it is necessary to include other cultures than those who can be found in the inner circle: “I do not know if it is necessary … No, because, I do not think it's necessary. They are sufficient, those that exist.”

Even though there is some ambition to include more cultures, from at least the outer circle, in all three cases the textbook controls which cultures and countries that are present in the classroom.
However, both Sara and Martin highlight how addressing foreign cultures enables the learner’s curiosity and Sara says: “…they get interested, they think it is fascinating and exciting so there is a curiosity.” Moreover, she argues that it is probably the contrasts that draw the learner’s attention and curiosity. They appreciate to learn English through different cultures where English is being used. Martin, like Sara, emphasizes the contrasts as a source of curiosity for the students and uses different dialect as an example: “They think it is good fun when there is a strange dialect, like in Australia, or India, which is very pronounced. England and the United States are much more frequent. But Indian English, they do not hear that so often, the same with Australian, it is a bit unusual as well.”

When introduced to the concept of possibly including expanding circle countries in their education and to offer opportunities for the learners to reflect over cultures and living conditions in the expanding circle, all three teachers where positive. However, both Sara and Martin point to certain practical problems of introducing the expanding circle. Martin: “Yes, I think they would be interested to include. If only facts, relevant facts of Europe were available.” Sara pointed to similar issues as Martin: “It may not be as easy to find information about it because the other (inner circle countries) is so overrepresented. But I think that it could attract curiosity. How is it? Do you have to learn English in China or Russia? And how much time do they put on learning, and so on?” Martin also point to how it could be interesting to be able to contrast why we in Sweden are so much better at English than many other countries: “We are among the best at English in Europe, apart from England and Ireland. It would be interesting to be able to watch why, and I think that they (students) would think that was interesting.”

The two more experienced teachers clearly find the notion of a comparison among expanding circle countries as interesting in ELT, and on the questions why the teachers do not include more material like that, Martin answered resolutely: “Time! …or rather, the lack of it. You make things simple for yourself by using the textbook, but it requires so much time to look for other texts, for other tasks. It takes too much time. There are lots of literature that you could build the teaching around. But then you should do all the work yourself, and it takes time, and that time does not exist.”
Cultures in the Reading Material

The textbooks investigated in this study are written and created especially for Swedish students. The authors are from both Sweden and the UK and have extensive experience from teaching English from preschool to high school and adult education. Because the predominate part of the learners reading materials are found in the textbook, the variety of cultures present in the textbook obtains a profound role in which cultures that are present in the English classroom and which of Kachru’s circles that dominate the reading material in the textbooks.

Below follows a presentation of which nations that are present in the textbook that our three teachers use. I have used the phrase “clear presence in the chapter” when counting the present nations in the textbook. By this I mean that the chapters either revolve around something that is clearly linked to a specific national culture or that the characters in the text are undoubtedly from a specific country. An example can be that a chapter is focused around how people in USA celebrate Thanksgiving or how and why British students wear school uniforms. There needs to be a strong emphasize on a specific nation in the chapter for it to be considered as “clear presence”.

Grade Four

In the textbook for grade four, a clear emphasize is placed by the authors of the book on Australia and the UK. Canada and South Africa are only mentioned in the first chapters. That chapter presents a map of the world, and the countries that have English as a first language are highlighted. The distribution of countries present are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 4 Textbook</th>
<th>29 Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible Countries</td>
<td>Clear presence in the chapters:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grade Five

In grade five, nations like Australia and India become less significant. The USA, which was rather neglected in comparison with the UK and Australia in the year 4 textbook, is more significant. Sweden is mentioned in one chapter as a way of visualizing the difference between Swedish and English schools. “East-Africa” is mentioned in a fictional story included as an addition to a chapter, and it will be presented later in the text. The distribution of countries present are as follows:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 5 Textbook</th>
<th>25 Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible Countries</td>
<td>Clear presence in the chapters:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“East-Africa”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade Six

The textbook used in the sixth grade is dominated by the USA and the UK. India and Jamaica are mentioned, but the focus of the book is clearly to present the students with the American and British perspective of the English language and the cultures found within. The distribution of countries present are as follows:

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 Textbook</th>
<th>22 Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible Countries</td>
<td>Clear presence in the chapters:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Textbook Summary

In summary, it is clear that the authors of the textbook used by the teachers I have interviewed for this study have focused on presenting countries that can be found in the inner circle of Kachru’s model. Chapters that have a clear presence of either the USA or the UK constitutes fifty percent of all the chapters from the grades four to six. Australia, which is also in the inner circle, is clearly visible, but it does not acquire the same status as the both nations mentioned above. India is the country in the outer circle which is presented the most times in these textbooks. The expanding circle is present with Sweden and Egypt, but their presence is insignificant in comparison to the nations in the inner circle. The distribution of countries present are as follows:

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook summary:</th>
<th>76 Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible Countries</td>
<td>Clear presence in the chapters:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>19 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>19 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>7 (approx. 9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>6 (approx. 8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2 (approx. 3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1 (approx. 1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East-Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Stories Present in the Textbook

In the textbooks, there are some short examples of longer stories that the authors have selected to be a part of the textbook. In some cases, the texts are connected to a specific chapter, and sometimes the short stories stand on their own. The teachers use these stories in their ELT, as additional reading material. The texts are included in the textbook package that the teachers have
been involved in selecting and buying. Below follows a list of the stories, and highlighted is the authors national background and in which country the story takes place.

Grade Four

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and author</th>
<th>Authors origin</th>
<th>Plot:</th>
<th>Plot set in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Fire Boy” by Stephen Rabley.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>About a boy who lives in ancient</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hannah and the Hurricane” by John</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>About a girl who works with taking</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escott.</td>
<td></td>
<td>tourist out to see the coral reef.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Robin Hood” retold by Liz Austin.</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>The classic story about Robin Hood</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and his merry men.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade Five

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and author</th>
<th>Authors origin</th>
<th>Plot:</th>
<th>Plot set in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Leopard and the lighthouse” by Anne</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>A leopard swims across the sea to the</td>
<td>East-Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins.</td>
<td></td>
<td>island of Sindi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mikes Lucky Day” by Leslie Dunkling.</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>A love story between to young people.</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Tom Sawyer” by Mark Twain.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Adventures of the young</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>troublemaker Tom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade Six

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and author</th>
<th>Authors origin</th>
<th>Plot:</th>
<th>Plot set in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The Earthquake” by Elisabeth Laird.</td>
<td>Born in New</td>
<td>A story about three young lovers who</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zealand, raised</td>
<td>experience the complications of</td>
<td>South-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the UK</td>
<td></td>
<td>country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Short Stories Summary

There is a total of ten fictional stories included in the textbook and similar to the chapters in the book the content is dominated by inner circle countries. Forty percent of the stories are set in the UK and twenty percent take place in the USA. When one examines the authors one finds that fifty percent of them are from the UK and twenty percent comes from the USA.

The purpose of this study is not to investigate the content of all these fictional texts. Even though it would be highly interesting the time framework does not allow such research. Nonetheless, shorter versions of the texts are included in the textbook and the content of these texts are of interest. A clear majority of the stories revolve around the native speaking norm but the different cultural contexts varies and could be used to broaden our learners’ cultural perspectives. Even though an inner circle context dominates, outer- and expanding circle problematics about learning English or experiences of living as an immigrant in an English-speaking country is evident. In some stories, that are set in inner circle countries, with a native speaking norm, small keys are present that could lead to doors that, with a responsive teacher, inspires the learners to reflect over cultures and living conditions of people that are not native speakers of English. A story by Catherine McPhail that can be found in the sixth grade textbook, is about an immigrant boy who struggles to find his place and purpose in England. These short paragraphs below contain topics and experiences that could be the subject for more versatile conversations, then discussing American baseball or Afternoon Tea. These topics could lead to discussions and reflections about cultural belonging and language learning.
“I am writing my letters in English because when you come to this country to live, you must speak good English. When I first came here I did not speak good English. I said all the wrong words. It was very embarrassing. I had a face that was red all the time. I do not want you to make the same mistakes…”

“My father was a doctor back in my country. But the government said he was looking after the wrong people and put him in prison. Here in this country he can’t work at all, until they decide if we can stay. That makes my father very sad.”

(from: “Under my Skin” by Catherine McPhail)

The multi-ethnic Sweden of today have many similarities with other parts of the world. For example, the same trials and tribulations of finding your place in a foreign world can be found in inner circle countries as well. Perhaps, not by the native speakers but by other people, from e.g. the expanding circle, who move or are forced to move to a strange, unknown country. The paragraphs above are packed with recognizable situations for many of our young learners that struggle with language learning and adapting to a new culture.

Discussion

This next part of the study will include a discussion about the data that have been collected for this research. The findings will be analysed and put into relation with concepts and thoughts presented in the literary review. The aim is to revisit the different research questions and discuss if any relevant conclusions are possible based on the collected material. The purpose of this study was never to debate whether American or British cultures ought to be a part of the English language education in Sweden. Those cultures, in particular, have had a considerable influence on and importance in establishing English as an international language. Therefore, these cultures should play a prominent role in the English classroom. However, other cultures from the outer- and expanding circle must not be ignored and discarded; rather, they ought to be given a more significant part of the ELT.
Foreign Cultures in the Reading Material

The three teachers interviewed for this study, even though some differences in their opinion and teaching method could be found, all relied on the textbook when selecting reading material to use in the classroom. One could say that the selection of foreign cultures visible in the reading material was made by the authors of the textbook and not by our interviewees: the teachers. In this lies a problem, because a textbook, no matter how well written or how well adapted to the SNCE, can never be customized to the massive diversity found in our classrooms. This study shows how little reflection is made over the content in the reading material. To not reflect over current situations concerning culture is no strange phenomenon because people rarely reflect over their own culture and the choices they make (Nieto, 1999, p. 53). However, teachers ought to reflect on what material is present in their classroom. McKay (2009) states that when selecting reading materials the teachers ought to challenge both the linguistic and cultural norms of the material. The material should encourage the learners to reflect on their own culture in relation to others and the diversity among all cultures ought to be accentuated. An additional aspect is that the material should be critically examined not only by the teachers but also by the pupils, and the cultural content ought to be discussed and reflected upon (p.100). The teachers in this study made conscious choices about the reading material, and they moved around in the textbook, finding suitable material. However, little concern was taken regarding the cultural content of the texts. Martin focused almost solely on the linguistic challenges of the text, and Sara, when making conscious choices, tried to relate the reading material to learner interest. Many of the aims of the curriculum can be met by selecting this approach to ELT, but others are, unfortunately, neglected. Denying the pupils, the opportunity to “…reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (SNCE, 2011, p.32) makes them less prepared to meet language challenges that lies before them.

Sercu (2006) highlights how textbooks tend to play an essential role in language education and that most textbooks modify their content to solely present foreign cultures. Intercultural aspects are neglected and little importance is place on self-reflection (p.70). McKay (2009) highlights how teachers ought to approach foreign cultures with a cross-cultural approach that allows the learners to reflect on their own culture in relation to others (p.83). As Sercu (2006) states,
“…teacher training should provide opportunities for the teachers to reflect on the quality of their teaching materials for promoting the acquisition of intercultural competence in their learners, and assist teachers to adapt existing teaching materials” (p.70). An adaptation of the existing material combined with more reflective approach could be a way to develop the education to broaden the spectrum of what constitutes an English-speaking context. As McKay (2009) argues, English as an international language functions as a means of communication between people and cultures (p.81). With this attitude towards the English language, one cannot solely focus on inner circle countries. In the context where expanding circle countries communicate in English, it could intrigue our learners further and, by opening new doors to the English language, make them realize the value of their own variety of English.

The reading material researched for this study is highly dominated by cultures centred around the USA and Britain. When asked why other reading materials and cultures were not present in the ELT, Martin pointed to time as an aspect that restricts the teachers. However, as mentioned above, an adaptation could be made to the existing material that allows other cultural perspectives to be permitted entrance into the classroom. The teachers do not need to find new material when they could use the textbook as a foundation for the education and apply new perspectives to the existing texts: perspectives that allow more reflection and thought about different contexts and situations where English is being used. The example of the story about the life and troubles of a young immigrant boy in the UK is an excellent example of how the education can be broaden using the existing material. The teachers need to back away from the elephant, in this case the textbook. If you stand to close to the elephant, all you see is the grey, wrinkly skin; but if you back away, the perspectives are broadened and you see so much more. You might even see the whole elephant. As stated above, teachers ought to be given, or find, time to reflect on the teaching materials that they use. Within that material, there could be new perspectives to explore and opportunities for the pupils to develop their abilities to reflect over foreign cultures.

Geertz (1973) claims that humans exist as creative subjects within a specific culture and that we are essentially aware of the meaning of our actions (p.89). Nieto’s (1999) argumentation is somewhat the opposite, as he states that people are seldom mindful of the actions they make (p.53). Nevertheless, it can be argued to what extent we humans are aware of their actions and
the meaning of it all. When one discusses the use of reading material in an average English classroom in Sweden, this small study shows that little or no reflection on or awareness of cultural context existed when our teachers made their choices. Geertz (1973) states that culture is ever present in all contexts where people act and react, communicate and function (ibid). That is certainly true. Although if the teacher does little or no reflection over which cultures are present in the reading material, one can only assume that this aspect is absent among the pupils as well. Our learners are perhaps not aware of the concept of culture and that they are intertwined with the surrounding world outside their familiar setting. Perhaps this concept does not need to be lifted into the English education in middle school, but a reflection over the reading material and its contextual background ought to be present. Within this perspective lies opportunities not only to learn language but also to develop as a thinking critical individual who is better equipped to cope with future challenges. Challenges such as communicating with other English speaking people from the expanding circle in either a business related context or one of more familiar character.

Dominating Cultures in the Reading Material

One of the main objectives of this study was to investigate how and visualize which cultures were represented in the reading material in the English classroom. Because the three teachers, in this study, almost exclusively use the content of the textbook when addressing reading material in their classroom. It is predominately inner circle cultures and countries, like the UK and the USA, that constitute the reading material.

In the regular chapters, which are those that are numbered and follows a certain order, in the textbook, fifty percent revolves around American or British cultures; and in the additional stories, they make up approximately sixty percent. But why is that wrong? Or, is it wrong to focus solely on these inner circle countries and their cultures. Of course, it is not wrong to include chapters and texts about England, USA, Australia, or any other inner circle country for that matter. However, the English speaking world of today is so much more extensive, and to implement an education that revolves solely one a few native speaking countries does not suffice. McKay (2009) argues that if one views English as an international language, as one must do, the primary function of that language today is to serve as a means of communication between
different cultures (p.81). Business transactions, exchange of ideas and beliefs, correspondence between politicians and governments are all situations and phenomena in which English is present. In these situations, if one considers the fact that, according to Kachru the inner circle constitutes of approximately 350 million English speaking people and that the expanding circle comprises of upwards to one billion English speaking people, it is more likely that we encounter and interact in English with persons from the expanding circle than from the inner circle. As McKay (2009) states, we ought to move away from the view that solely connects the English language to native speaking countries (ibid). We as teachers must confront and discuss the ruling paradigm that places British or American English as the norm and present our learners with the opportunity to experience a greater variety of English (Kubota, 2012, p.56).

Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) argue that if we want to move away from the traditional way of ELT, which has a clear emphasis on American or British English, we cannot simply add new components and instructions to a current educational approach (p.25). “What is needed is a complete revision of the entire program, using one’s understanding of the use of English in international contexts as a foundation that influences every single aspect of the curriculum” (ibid). Hino (2012), like Matsuda and Friedrich, argues that expanding circle countries ought to distance themselves from the endonormative perspective and stop focusing on mimicking American or British English. The expanding circle countries should convert their language education to better prepare their pupils for the challenges that come with communicating in an international context (p.28). However, one must reflect and take into account the actual teachers that are supposed to apply this alteration in the English classroom. As mentioned above, the teachers of this study pointed to time, or the lack of time, as a factor when deciding to rely on the textbook. It is safe, the children know the book, and they know the method of teaching. The risk one takes with a too great ambition to change something is that an already stressed and overburdened group of teachers embrace the new concepts with scepticism and negativity. Nonetheless, as Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) state, the decisions concerning which texts and how to use them are often made hastily and without any deliberation. The choices are seldom based on the needs and interests of the learners (p.17). However, even a stressed workgroup of teachers should always reflect on the reading materials used in the classroom to ensure that they are aligned with the curriculum. There are no excuses.
When it comes to adapting the reading material to the pupils, our more experienced teachers disagree on how to adjust and choose reading material based on learner interest. Martin chooses to focus solely on the linguistic challenges when picking chapters and texts to use. Sara emphasises that she tries to connect the reading material to the children’s interests. As a teacher student, writing a degree project in 2018, it is hard not to agree with the latter. As Hino (2012) declares, those in the expanding circle must create pedagogical methods that draw upon the interests and conditions that exist within our own classroom: “This approach will enable us to stop committing the mistake of forcing native-speaker norms on our students and will empower the learners with vital tools to effectively express themselves in this age of globalization” (p.41).

This does not necessarily have to imply the scrapping of the textbook. The perspective merely needs to change to include more critical thinking and awareness of the existing reading material and the linguistic norms that traditionally dominate the ELT. Kubota (2012) states that there should exist a questioning of linguistic norms, and the student’s reflective abilities ought to be developed alongside with their communicative skills. A critical and reflective approach would better respond to the multicultural communities that are constantly developing both domestically and abroad (p.67). This critical approach should not only be exclusively for the students. The teachers must be aware of the reading material they use and embrace a critical approach that provides a reflection about the linguistic norms that are the foundation of the texts. Nevertheless, it is hard, near too impossible, to conduct an ELT in Sweden today that draws upon the interest of the learners and not include the USA or England. So much of the popular culture of today that attracts and entices our young learners has its origin in America and/or the UK. The interest in English/American music, books, comic heroes, films, TV-series etc. is so routed in our cultural background that it is impossible to ignore. With the spread of the English language through either colonisation or financial aid, like the post Second World War, Marshall plan, came cultural influences that allowed the endonormative perspective of English native speaking countries to spread beyond the borders of England or the USA. What we as teachers must do is to raise awareness about these circumstances and make our learners aware of why and how English became an international language.

However, the influence over the English language has shifted. No longer do inner circle countries alone stipulate the conditions for the development of English; rather, it is “…in the Expanding Circle where there is the greatest potential for continued spread of English” (McKay,
The methodical choices we teacher make and what reading material we use in English class need to be more complex and though through: “The selection of an instructional variety should be made locally and individually, taking various contextual factors into consideration, including learning goals, the teacher’s background, local attitudes toward English(es) and the availability of didactic materials” (Matsuda and Friedrich, 2012, p.23). If time limits the teacher’s didactic material choice, and there is little time to search for and evaluate other materials than the textbook, certain actions can still be made when working with existing reading material. If the texts in the textbook are examined from another perspective, one can find materials that can be used to discuss and reflect over intercultural perspectives. Our students have an exclusive English voice that is their own; it is not a British voice or an American one. It’s Swedish, its Scanian, in this region, and it is their own version of English and they should be made aware of that fact and be proud that they are a part of the development of English as an international language.

The Teacher Perspective

How do the teachers perceive their practise of presenting foreign cultures to the learners? The answer to this research question is rather one dimensional because the education conducted by our three teachers is quite similar. Since the education centres around the content of the textbook, the practise is dominated by the endonormative perspective. The native speaking norm rules the education and the notion of an education based on a exonormative perspective is completely absent among our three teachers. As Sara states, “England, America, Australia, those are the ones we stick to…”. The frequent cultures are those from the textbook and therefore almost solely inner circle cultures. Martin’s education is also unambiguously endonormative, and he reasons that “The book (textbook) that we use, addresses most of it. There is some about India, and Australia. It jumps around in the English speaking world”. Hino (2012) states that if one desires to create an education style that develops the learner’s ability to communicate internationally in English, one must move towards an exonormative education (p.29). To copy and to imitate a native speaking norm is not only unnecessary, but also impossible. Which English should we choose then? Should all our learners imitate the cast from Downton Abbey? Would that prepare them better for the challenges ahead? Hino (2012) argues that we in the expanding circle should present an educational approach that broadens the point of view for the
learners and lets them see and experience a greater variety of English (p.28). The teachers ought to create a learning situation in which the pupils can explore their own version of English and then interculturally examine and relate their own version to that of foreign cultures.

Both Martin and Sara point to the lack of information about foreign cultures as a hindering factor to including other cultures than those present in the textbook. Martin: “Yes, I think they would be interested to include. If only facts, relevant facts of Europe were available.” Sara: “It may not be as easy to find information about it because the other (inner circle countries) is so overrepresented. But I think that it could attract curiosity”. One can argue if the inclusion of an exonormative perspective is dependent on facts or information about foreign cultures, as can be seen in the argumentation above, perspectives that would allow a greater variety of discussions about heritage and cultural belonging are already present in the material in the textbook. It is a shift from relying on known methods and views in ELT to a perspective that challenges the teacher’s ability to reflect over the content in the reading material, which we should strive for. However, this is something that does not happen without effort and education. The inspiration for this study is collected from a completed course at the teacher education at Malmö University. One of the learning outcomes of the course, *English Studies and Education: Culture, Internationalization and Assessment*, was as follows: “Problematize the school subject of English in relation to English as a global language, analyse and critically evaluate how the concept of culture is expressed in the syllabus for English and what this means for the language classroom”. The course provided the opportunity for future teachers to explore social and cultural phenomena in the context of the English classroom and how English as a global language influence the education in the years four to six. The concept of interculturality and English as an international language were addressed and discussed throughout the course. This provided an opportunity to reflect and discuss over our own perception of the cultures present in the ELT. However, the three teachers in this study have not attended this course, which is probably the reason for the absence of expanding circle cultures and a exonormative perspective. Consequently, it is highly probable that they have never encounter a situation in which these matters have been discussed. If we desire an English education that presents our learners with the opportunity to develop their reflective abilities and that makes them consider cultural phenomena in all the parts of the world where English is spoken. If we desire an exonormative English education that lets our learners explore and encounter reading material that includes a greater variety of English, and not only
that of the native speaking linguistic norm then we ought to find time and space for our English teachers so they can be given the opportunity to enlarge their knowledge and broaden their perspectives. With new perspectives on what constitutes an English speaking culture, the teachers could adapt an approach to teaching that would better prepare our young learners for the challenges that lie before them in an expanding global world.

**Conclusion**

The research questions for this study had the purpose of examining which cultures that are present in the reading material in our Swedish schools. The extent of the study is limited and no major overall conclusions can be made from solely studying the English education among three teachers at one specific school. However, the findings are still relevant because they present a slice of how three teachers perceive their practise of presenting foreign cultures to their learners. The three teachers of this study relied almost exclusively on the reading material present in the textbook. An examination of the cultures in the textbook revealed a massive dominance of inner circle countries. The UK and the USA where highly overrepresented. However, this is not necessarily something that automatically disqualifies the reading material. The British and American culture is a major part in our young learners lives and if we desire a curiosity and involvement from our learners we need to find subjects that entice them, and make them want to learn. This can, however, not be the sole content of the reading material in our English language education. The English language of today is an international language and we ought to prepare our pupils better for the cultural encounters ahead. This study shows how outer and expanding circle cultures are almost completely neglected in the reading material in the textbook. An endonormative perspective with a focus on the native speaking norm is considered suitable among the teachers of this study. Except, that the English speaking world today is larger than that and we ought to move away from an English education that merely revolves around native speaking cultural phenomena. The expanding circle countries need to have an education that highlights our own contribution to the English language. How our variety of English is unique and, we should let the learners acknowledge and appreciate that fact.
Even though the teachers of this study were ambivalent about which cultures that are relevant for an English education they all desired an education that did not rely so heavily on the textbook. Shortage of time and the lack of appropriate materials where arguments for not including more about outer and expanding circle cultures in the education. However, as this study revealed, there are reading materials in the textbook that would allow a more versatile discussion about living conditions in different contexts where English is being used. What needs to be done is to present an opportunity for active teachers to obtain the same knowledge about interculturality and English as an international language as we students at Malmö University acquire. This study demonstrates that the ambition to change the English education is evident but our three teachers lack the tools to move towards an exonormative approach. The notion of what it constitutes, to be a part of the English speaking world today, is not present in their everyday considerations about which reading material to choose.

Limitations of the Study

As mentioned above, the extent of this study and the fact that only three teachers were interviewed present a result that is not generalizable. The teachers were chosen based on convenience because the school is located in my vicinity and we were previously acquainted. A greater number of teachers from a variety of schools in different socio economical areas would obviously provide a more reliable result. Another aspect is the design of the interviews and the fact that I, as interviewer may have influenced them in some way.

Further Research

This study revealed interesting facts about how little teachers reflect on the content of the reading material in English. Commonly in their selection of material, the linguistic challenges were in focus. Therefore, it would be interesting to dive deeper into the reading material that this study has researched and adopt a different perspective on culture. The cultural perspective of this research is connected to countries and which national context the reading material revolves around. As I researched the reading material and examined which countries that were present I, out of curiosity, noted which genders and ethnicity that were represented in the texts. The inquiry
(I highly un-scientific one) revealed that the content was highly dominated by a homogeneously traditional family constellation. To investigate further which genders and ethnic belonging that is visible in the reading material would be really interesting. Also too see if the teacher’s reflection on this matter differs from that of foreign cultures and if it is something that they consider in their daily activity as teachers. The world around us is not as one dimensional as an English textbook would like us to think. The cultural variety that can be found, not only in the surrounding world but in our backyard as well need to be a part of our young learner’s education.
References


Appendices

Interview Questions

Background
For how long have you been a teacher?
What grades do you teach?
How long have you been teaching English in 4-6?
Where did you get your education? Which school and year?

Reading material
What type of reading material does your students encounter in English class? How do you approach those texts?
Strategies/what reading strategies? Group reading?
Give me an example? Read on their own? Read out load?
Why do choose these strategies?

Is there a change your approach to the reading material when you teach the different age groups?
If so, then what are the reasons for the change of approach. If not, why??

How do you choose the reading material that you use?
Who decides what books to use? School? Team of teachers? You?
Would you like to have more control over what materials to use?
What do you think of the textbook?

Cultures
What role does foreign cultures play in the English classroom, in particular the reading material for your students?
How much and how often are different cultures where English is being used present in the English classroom?

What cultures are, in particular, are most visible in the reading material? What countries? (The other circle) How about countries like Kenya or India?

What is your perception of which cultures occur in the English reading material that the students encounter? Would you like to include it more, and if so, how would you implement it?

How do you perceive your students’ appreciation for texts where foreign cultures are presented? What do you think makes them like/don´t like that kind of texts?

Would you like to include countries that is not England, USA or countries from the colonies like India?
Which countries and how would you use?
(If no other countries in the classroom) Why don’t you include more cultures in the classroom?