



# ENGLISH TEACHERS' USE OF AND APPROACH TO MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

A BACHELOR PROJECT

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*“Every now and then I can find something that sparks a little bit of light in [my students] [...]. It doesn't necessarily make a difference. But I could maybe plant a seed that could grow into something later.”*

- Teacher 3 (see Appendix 3C)

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*Sade Zabala, May 2024*

# 1. Introduction

The following bachelor project is based on a personal and professional interest in exploring English teachers' work with multiculturalism and multicultural literature, specifically with regards to whether and how students in English classes are represented by the type of content teachers use in their lessons.

The Status for Integration delineates how the Danish public school system is becoming increasingly multicultural. As of 2022, roughly 30% of students are said to have a non-Western minority background. With the inclusion of pupils identifying with other minority groups, the percentage naturally increases (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2022). Thus, it stands to reason that teachers must accommodate the needs of a multicultural classroom when selecting class materials and content. This reasoning is supported by Paragraph 18 of the Public School Act, which states that the organization of lessons and selection of class materials must correspond to the individual student's needs and prerequisites (Folkeskoleloven, 2021, § 18).

There are other reasons to incorporate multiculturalism in the English classroom. Mette Buchardt claims that culturally homogenous lessons which cater mainly to western perspectives can impede the well-being of minority students, as well as impact the cultural competence of students who are part of majority groups (Buchardt & Fabrin, 2012). Her assertion is reflected in numerous studies throughout the decade. Notably, PISA (Beuchert, Christensen & Jensen, 2018, pp. 12-14) and *Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd* (Salomonsen, 2015) have reported how students with an immigrant background consistently underperform academically compared to their non-immigrant counterparts. A separate report by VIVE explains how this may be a result of a sense of estrangement. That is to say, minority pupils' scholastic learning, including in English, are negatively affected by pupils feeling they do not belong in the class environment, which is typically defined as Danish or eurocentric (SFI, 2010, p. 15).

In that regard, I find it relevant to look at English teachers' understanding of multiculturalism in a class context, and how, if at all, they include multicultural literature and pedagogy in their lessons.

The above has led me to the following problem statement:

***How do English teachers use and didactically approach multicultural literature, and which challenges do working with multicultural literature entail for the English teacher's practice?***

## 2. Structure

The structure of this bachelor's thesis project (henceforth project) adheres to the Anglo-Saxon project view, since the theoretical framework is outlined independent of the analysis prior to being used to elucidate the collected empirical data (Pjengaard, 2019, p. 70).

The project is organized into five parts:

- *The theoretical framework*, where key concepts, theories and research are defined to lay the foundation for the oncoming empirical and analytical work.
- *A methodology*, where the research design is explained, and qualitative and quantitative studies are presented and discussed for transparency.
- *The empirical analysis*, where collected data is analyzed according to theory.
- *The conclusion*, where the problem statement is answered using results from the analysis, which subsequently leads to specific action measures in relation to the problem statement.
- *A bibliography*, where the references used in this paper are elaborated.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1. Clarification of underlying concepts

As this project uses concepts that have multiple connotations, I find it essential to define my understanding of them. They are as follows.

### 3.1.1. Minority

Frederik Barth, along with his Danish counterpart Berit Thorbjørnsrud, describes that a majority group is characterized by its power of definition, which allows it to dictate the premises under which everyone must act. Minorities must therefore act based on the majority's terms (Thorbjørnsrud, 2009, p. 225). Mira Skadegård's findings support this. As per Skadegård, the majority in Denmark has a stance of heteronormative whiteness from which other cultures and identities are defined. Hence, anything veering outside of this is considered a minority. i.e., a disabled, LGBTQ+, dark-skinned, or muslim individual (Jensen, 2020, p. 189). The project will employ the terms "minority" and "majority" to draw attention to the processes and relationships around power and status that are connected to providing equal educational opportunities to all children in the Danish elementary school system, especially for ethnic minority students.

### 3.1.2. Multiculturalism

American researcher James A. Banks, a pioneer in the field of multicultural education reform, defines the concept thus: "[Multiculturalism] addresses the similarities and differences amongst students and incorporates these within the classroom on a daily basis, rather than in a 'tokenistic' manner" (Banks, 1994). He emphasizes how students' diverse experiences must be recognized and met with openness in the school's practice, as authentic representation of marginalized minority groups is essential to ensure all students' scholastic success. In this regard, he uses multicultural education as a synonym for multiculturalism. Nadia Mansour (2020, pp. 15-17) reiterates Banks' views in her PhD, *Multikulturel litteratur i danskfaget*. Thus, this project will use multiculturalism and multicultural education interchangeably. In this project, multiculturalism is understood as a way of dealing with societal cultural diversity, where diversity – in religion, culture, and ethnicity – is valued. This stands in opposition to the monoculturalism that upholds the majority culture, which in a Danish context is white, western, heterosexual, and Christian (Kampmann, 2016).

### 3.1.3. Tokenism

Tokenism refers to the practice of lax inclusion of individuals from minority groups. This creates an impression of inclusiveness and deflects accusations of discrimination. Within the context of literature, an example could be a book with white characters, where a dark-skinned person has been included in a minor, often stereotypical, role to create a false sense of diversity and inclusion.



Banks claims that minority characters in many books are written in a tokenistic manner and that some teachers themselves may have tokenistic attitudes towards minority cultures (Positive Action, 2021).

### 3.1.4. Stereotypes

American sociologist Lawrence Blum (2004) defines stereotypes as powerful cognitive distortions that can shape the way one views and interacts with stereotyped minority groups. These groups are thereby at risk of being treated in a demoralizing and dehumanizing manner. Blum reiterates that people are not born with notions of stereotypes, but that children can develop stereotypes through their environment. The most stable stereotypes found in society are upheld and reproduced through literary narratives such as those found in books, films, etc. Since stereotypes are mere social constructions, they can be broken down or influenced. Recognizing and acting against stereotypes is often named as a precursor for cultural and intercultural competence (Mansour, 2021, pp. 45-46), the latter of which is an essential competence students must develop as per the subject booklet for English (UVM, 2019).

## 3.2. Theories and research

The clarification of the above terms has sought to define the project's understanding of key concepts that are germane to further understand the central locus of the problem statement – multicultural literature. I will now outline relevant studies that will serve as the foundation for my project.

### 3.2.1. Research on multicultural literature

Multicultural literature is a concept that arose as an extension of the abovementioned multicultural education reform in the USA (Banks, 1994). Due to the contemporariness of multicultural education research in Denmark, there is a lack of data available on this field, especially with regards to multiculturalism in children's literature. For this reason, I will cite international research. An analysis of around 5,000 American children's and adolescent books from 2013 has shown that only approx. 10% contained at least one non-white character; these were often black and portrayed as "slaves, servants, sharecroppers" (Rudman & Botelho, 2009, p. 74). Ergo, multicultural literature is not merely about representing minorities, but also a question of *how* minorities are represented, and *how* the literature is used in class (Albertsen, 2013).

### 3.2.2. The Public School Act

The integration of multicultural literature is relevant in light of the Public School Act, which states:

*“Undervisningens tilrettelæggelse, herunder valg af undervisnings- og arbejdsformer, metoder, undervisningsmidler og stofudvælgelse, skal i alle fag leve op til folkeskolens formål, mål for fag samt emner og varieres, så den svarer til den enkelte elevs behov og forudsætninger.”(Folkeskoleloven, 2021, § 18)*

This places an obligation on teachers to design and execute lessons on the basis of all students’ prerequisites. One must hereby take into account the cultures, identities, or languages to be utilized in class. That is to say, all students’ backgrounds and experiences must be reflected in the English teacher’s choice of content and methods of content integration.

Additionally, the National Curricular Goals for English stipulates the need to cultivate students’ intercultural competence by working with topics *“der belyser, hvordan mennesker tænker og lever i den engelsksprogede verden, så de bliver fortrolige med egen kultur i samspil med andre kulturer.”* (UVM, 2019). In other words, multicultural literature, with its multitude of multicultural topics and characters, can be an avenue for developing students’ intercultural competence.

### 3.2.3. Nadia Mansour: Multicultural literature from a Danish perspective

This project’s understanding of multicultural literature rests on Nadia Mansour (2020), who uses the words text and literature synonymously, and sees multicultural literature as texts that look at movements across cultures within a nation – be it fictional or non-fictional, though she primarily highlights the former. She underscores that a text’s multiculturalism is based on the content of the text, not on the sociocultural background of the author. The text must thus reflect different cultures in the country and avoid creating locked, cultural polarities. Furthermore, Mansour asserts that for a piece of literature to qualify as multicultural, it must:

- Reflect the diversity within the country’s borders
- Contain positive representation
- Prioritize minorities’ perspectives over the majority’s
- Deal with universal themes
- Include linguistic mix or code-switching

Such multicultural texts can open up conversations about identity, discrimination and culture; ergo, multicultural literature has a literary didactic potential in relation to expanding students' cultural competence, which Mansour deems as a prerequisite to and the supercategory of intercultural competence (Mansour, 2020, p. 47). It is to be noted that Mansour's PhD and her findings are specific to Danish literature and, by extension, the subject Danish. However, she describes in several articles, as well as an online interview I conducted, how her findings and recommendations are applicable in other linguistic subjects, including English (Mansour, N., personal communication, September 20, 2023).

### 3.2.4. Michael Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Mansour's PhD is also rooted in Michael Byram's study of ICC, which the latter defines as the ability to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds and identities without categorizing them into stereotypes (Byram et al, 2002). Byram (2021) divides ICC into five sub-components:

1. **Knowledge** about one's own and others' culture.
2. **Skills in interpreting and relating** content from other cultures with that from one's own culture.
3. **Attitudes** of curiosity and openness.
4. **Skills in exploration and interaction** with other cultures.
5. **Critical cultural awareness**; the ability to reflect, analyze and evaluate respectfully but critically, on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives and habits/traditions within one's own and other cultures.

Byram's work has been critiqued as too abstract to be used in practice. This poses a problem for English teachers since the Common Goals for English stipulate that "*eleverne skal i faget engelsk udvikle... interkulturelle kompetencer*" (UVM, 2019). Mansour argues that one way to develop intercultural competence is through the use of multicultural texts (Mansour, N., personal communication, September 20, 2023). She provides a model with which teachers can follow to qualify their work with multicultural literature.

### 3.2.5. Nadia Mansour's Process Model

Mansour specifies how the above-listed features of multicultural texts are insufficient in gauging the effectiveness of using multicultural literature to develop intercultural competence. She proposes the use of her three-stage Process Model (see Appendix 4) as a reflection tool for text selection and for text encounters in the classroom (Mansour & Jacobsen, 2021). In the first stage, the teacher's content choices are represented in different colors that symbolize a diversity of texts (e.g., short stories, poems, biographies, etc.). During the second stage, the class must meet the text collectively in a joint reading to give way for discussion and broadening of perspectives for the development of cultural and intercultural competences. Finally, at the last stage, students relate differently to each text, so their analyses, interpretations, and identity negotiations are unpredictable. Moreover, the dotted lines illustrate how students are influenced by other people's readings and experiences. It is then imperative that the teacher, firstly, acts as a role model in discourses on cultural topics and, secondly, supports the students' interpretation of the text with a composition analysis as well as open and authentic follow-up questions. This gives space for differing possible answers that relate to each students' values, thoughts and ways of life as well as their perceptions of others'.

### 3.2.6. James A. Banks' Framework for Content Integration

Mansour's model is inspired by Banks'. Since the 90s, Banks has undertaken several studies in which he concludes how the school curriculum promotes the interests and outlooks of the majority group. Banks claims that the majority group uses tokenism to uphold the status quo by falsely leading minorities into believing their perspectives are being taken into equal account in the curriculum. Such unreflected inclusion of cultural topics and artifacts can cause students to form or maintain stereotypes towards minority groups. To counter this, Banks (2004) distinguishes between four types of content integration, wherein the last two must be the goal in order to achieve true multicultural curricular reform:

- **Contributions:** Cultural elements are superficially added to the curriculum in a stereotyped manner, i.e., a class celebrates Cinco de Mayo with sombreros.
- **Additions:** Cultural content is added to the curriculum with a mainstream perspective, i.e., a poem by a black slave in a lesson about slavery in the USA. This prompts

students to believe they are knowledgeable about a cultural topic, when, in fact, they have only been presented with the majority group's view of the story.

- ***Transformative:*** Addition of a variety of perspectives that challenge the mainstream curriculum. Students are encouraged to deconstruct any preconceived notions of the world, as well as taught intercultural skills such as self-reflection, critical thinking, and openness.
- ***Social Action:*** Students discuss diverse social issues and try to solve them in four steps: identifying and discussing a dilemma, gathering data, analyzing data and taking action.

I have now presented the theoretical perspectives which serve as the fulcrum of this project. They will be used in the empirical analysis to shed light on the collected data with the purpose of investigating the problem statement. Before I proceed to the analysis, I will expound on the methods employed to gather data for the project.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Scientific theoretical position

This project's scientific theoretical position is hermeneutic phenomenology as the project works with defined key concepts and phenomena such as multiculturalism, multicultural literature, and stereotypes, which are then interpreted based on the experiences and understanding of the various participants involved in the collection of data (Mottelson & Muschinsky, 2020). This relates to the interviewees, respondents to the questionnaires, as well as myself, considering the project is constructed around my own understanding of the adopted theoretical perspectives, research, and models, which are used to examine and answer the problem statement. One challenge with the hermeneutical phenomenological approach is that it can be difficult to generalize and analyze data gathered in a study (Mottelson & Muschinsky, 2020, p. 48). This can be counteracted in one's choice of research design.

## 4.2. Research design and approach

The research design is built around the mixed-methods approach, which allows different methods to supplement each other. Quantitative methods are good for generalizing and measuring data, whereas the strengths of the qualitative methods rest in their descriptive and explanatory nature. This means that the mixed-methods design offers measurable data from which, to some extent, generalizations can be made, along with an in-depth explanation for said data (Reimer & Sortkær, 2017). Below, the project's qualitative and quantitative methods will be presented respectively.

### 4.2.1. Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods sacrifice statistics and quantity, and thus risks posing lower reliability, as the goal is to get in-depth with participants' experiences and understanding of a certain topic (Mottelson & Muschinsky, 2020, p. 120). Because the knowledge that stems from qualitative data is based on both the respondents' and researcher's basis of experience, this entails a potential gray area when one talks about objectivity in research. To counter this, other applicable criteria such as transparency in methodology, data collection, and interpretation must be present throughout the project (Qvortrup, 2017). For that reason, the project strives to be transparent via outlining arguments for research choices, voicing awareness of other options possibly excluded by these choices, and stating any criticisms in relation thereof.

#### *Observations*

The strength of observations is that there is a focus on the practice itself, which differs from the other data collection methods, where there is a focus on individuals' experience of the practice (Østergaard, 2017).

For my observations, I observed three teachers (T1, T2, T3) and their classes (7.A & 7.B. for T2, 8.A & 8.B for T3, 9.A & 9.B for T1). Initially, I chose the unstructured observation form, where one observes without a structured template, as I was unsure what specifically to focus the project on. This form is ideal if one aims to objectively observe all focal points and avoid having one's perception filtered through a specific theoretical lens (Canger & Kaas, 2016). As I gathered data, I functioned as an observer who participates with a low degree of interaction with the observed

actors, and my role as observer is clear to everyone (Østergaard, 2017, pp. 32-33). There may be a risk that my presence affects the actions of the observed, as the awareness of being monitored can be intimidating for some (Qvortrup, 2017). Therefore, I introduced myself at the start of the observation and informed each class what and why I was observing, so the class will not feel negatively monitored. I ended up with an empirical observational basis of twelve lessons – two observations per class. After deciding on the project's main thesis post-observation, I researched more on the topics of multiculturalism and literature and came upon Mansour's Process Model as well as Banks' Framework for Content Integration, which I used to design two separate structured observation forms (see Appendix 1). I then organized the data from my unstructured observations accordingly. Ergo, observations that did not fit under any element of Mansour's model or Banks' framework were omitted in the structured versions.

That said, one can not draw up generalizations solely on the basis of these observations, which is why I followed them up with an interview.

### *Interviews*

This method allows the researcher to spot easily overlooked details during observations and to delve into the interviewee's perspective (Bjørndal, 2003). The downside to interviews is that it may prove arduous to get concrete responses from the interviewees, which is why I chose a semi-structured interview, as it lets the interviewer add new or follow-up questions accordingly providing deeper insight into the project's problem statement (Thisted, 2018).

### *Pre-interview*

Interviews were conducted with the three teachers involved in the observations in an attempt to gather their subjective experiences about their understanding of and work with multicultural literature. An interview guide, which is a prepared overview of themes and topics that will be addressed during the interview, was formulated prior. The guide consists of six main research questions pertinent to shedding light on the project's problem statement. These are further divided into 20 interview questions to ensure all relevant themes would be covered. The questions are ordered based on complexity and begin with factual questions about the interviewee to warm them up for the conversation and for the more probing open-ended questions later on (Bjørndal, 2003).

I met with the teachers at least fifteen minutes prior to the scheduled appointment to allow for a continuous positive rapport to be established. Before questioning commenced, I stated the purpose of the interview, my background, as well as the general topic of the project. I emphasized that all interviewees would be granted anonymity. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), these acts establish good contact and transparency between the interviewee and interviewer and sets the tone for the interview. Should bad contact be formed, this could lead to low validity in the interviewee's answers as they can, for instance, be superficial or false.

### ***Semi-structured Interview***

The interviews were carried out in an empty room at the schools. This sense of privacy and the familiarity of the locale allowed the teachers to speak freely and comfortably. A mobile phone on silent was used to record, and a printed interview guide was brought instead of a computer to minimize distractions. This, along with attentive listening, indicates to the interviewees that their responses are important and respected, which cultivates a positive experience, which in turn enables them to come up with comprehensive, thought-out answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

### ***Post-interview***

The interviews were later transcribed to allow the contents to be compiled and analyzed. Transcribing can, however, be time-consuming. Plus, the translation from one modality to another can be produced in several ways, which is why validity can be difficult to determine (Bak, 2017). To counter these disadvantages, care was taken to obtain good sound quality, so it would be easy to hear and understand what is being said (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

## **4.2.2. Quantitative method**

Although this project is predominantly inspired by qualitative methods, I also chose to include a quantitative method, a survey, to triangulate my data collection in order to achieve credibility (Yin, 2014, p. 47). Methodological triangulation is the use of several different methods to investigate the same phenomenon. With it, one compensates for the weaknesses of one method by supplementing with another method, thereby strengthening validity and creating reliability (Mottelson & Muschinsky, 2020). By triangulation, I get the opportunity to compare the project's



findings across the empirical evidence and look for recurring patterns that support my interpretations. With the quantitative method, one obtains structured data from numerous respondents in a short period. Quantitative studies are based on counts and therefore make the data generalizable and measurable (Mottelson & Muschinsky, 2020).

### Survey

To get an idea of how English teachers use and approach multicultural literature, as well as ascertain potential dilemmas in connection hereof, I conducted a survey among English teachers on the Facebook group *Engelsklærernes lounge* and two similar online communities. This leads to a caveat in the empirical evidence – there may be a risk that survey respondents comprise of highly active English teachers who use their free time to seek out and share knowledge with colleagues in order to improve their practice. This can color the result of the questionnaire in a way that may be misleading as pertaining to the practice of English teachers in Denmark.

The survey consists of 27 questions about the teachers' understanding and use of multicultural literature (see Appendix 2). It begins with factual questions, after which the focus shifts to cognitive questions, attitudinal, and action questions, which require respondents to think before answering (Sunesen, 2020, p. 75). This was done since complex questions can make respondents insecure, which affects their willingness to answer. The questions are designed so that there is only one question in each question. This is done with the survey's reliability in mind as per Sunesen's (2020) description of good survey questions: "*korte, entydige, relevante og formuleret sprogligt korrekt, uden brug af tekniske termer eller fremmedord.*"

Prior to being published, the survey was tested in a pilot test to ensure the questions would be understood as intended. In a pilot test, pilot testers must resemble the respondents' population (Reimer & Sortkær, 2017, p. 150), thus two English teachers and three fellow students who are educated English teachers participated in the test.

## 5. Empirical analysis

I will start the project's empirical analysis by looking at the interviewed teachers' understanding of the use and definition of multiculturalism and multicultural literature, which will then be held up against the project's understanding of the concepts as stated in the theoretical framework. Subsequently, the interviews will be analyzed based on the theories and research on multiculturalism, where answers from the questionnaire survey will also be included, in order to ascertain how teachers approach multicultural literature, and which challenges they face working with it. I will then follow up with an exploration of the teachers' use of multicultural literature in practice as documented under the observations, which will be examined using Mansour's and Banks' models. Observations will be supplemented by information gathered from the interview and survey.

### 5.1. Teachers' understanding of and approach to multicultural literature and multiculturalism

As stated in The Public School Act (2021), teachers are obligated to design lessons that accommodate the needs, backgrounds, and experiences of all students, whereas the National Curricular Goals for English calls for the development of students' intercultural competence by way of working with topics that allow students to become familiar with their own culture in interaction with other cultures. One could then argue that the teacher should consider multicultural literature as a tool to achieve these requirements. With this in mind, it is relevant to investigate whether English teachers are familiar with the concepts of multiculturalism and multicultural literature, and, if so, what their understanding of these are.

#### 5.1.1. *I wouldn't say we co-exist well*

The questionnaire survey had 108 completed answers, wherein 52.8% of respondents do not consider Denmark as a multicultural country (see Appendix 2, question 27). The three interviewed teachers are in agreement. T3 explains, "It's almost like there's a wall up in society. [...] I don't necessarily see it as a multicultural place. Obviously there's a lot of people coming from other EU countries, um, refugees exist, but I wouldn't say that we co-exist well". T1 adds, "*Jeg ved ikke,*

*om jeg vil kalde selve Danmark multikulturel, fordi det stadig er Danmark og danskernes kultur, der sætter dagsordenen.*” (see Appendix 3A)

Teachers who do not view Denmark as multicultural may be in risk of having these views seep into the classroom via their power of definition (Thorbjørnsrud, 2009). It was, for instance, observed, that T1 views his two classes differently culturally. In two separate lessons, students from 9.A and 9.B. were observed to have stopped reading the assigned texts. In 9.A., which is a culturally heterogeneous class, T1 chastises the students for not finishing reading the text 10 minutes before the lesson ends. In 9.B., which has a more homogenous Danish make-up, T1 allows students to stop reading the text and start playing with a ball 20 minutes before the lesson ends. He states: *“Det gør ikke noget, de plejer bare at lave det derhjemme. Det er en helt anden arbejdsstil og klassekultur end i 9.A, der terper de mere i løbet af timen, især pigerne, de er jo vant til det fra deres kultur.”* (see Appendix 1A)

If one considers Banks’ (2020) and Mansour’s (2021) work, it could stand to argue that multicultural literature could be an avenue to stimulate students’, as well as teachers’, ICC, especially attitudes of openness, to avoid the societal intolerance that the interviewed teachers mentioned, and possible stereotypical views on minority cultures, which T1 seems to have displayed during my observation.

### **5.1.2. Multicultural literature can develop ICC**

The three teachers agree that fictional multicultural literature is important for uplifting minority students’ self-perception and has the potential to develop all students’ ICC. T3 even mentions that even though her class is mostly made up of Danish students, she thinks they actually need to be exposed more to multicultural literature as “otherwise, I would just be feeding them one line of information, and they wouldn’t be able to grow or be challenged.” (see Appendix 3C)

However, the three teachers rarely use them in practice and place more emphasis on the importance of non-fiction genres and texts, including those found in textbooks.

**T1:** We don’t really work with it that much. [...] I don’t even think it’s in the goals for English. I think it’s more important for them to be aware of what is going on in the real

world, where they can take action [...]. Reading a poem or a novel isn't going to stop bullying. (see Appendix 3A)

The survey reflects this. While 99.1% of respondents agree multicultural literature contributes to ICC development, only 55.6% have in the last 6 months worked with fictive literary texts where the main character is not white. Additionally, fictive literature is the 6th choice of teaching aid to develop ICC, overranked by films, online portals, textbooks, non-fictive literature, and songs (see Appendix 2).

## 5.2. Multicultural literature, tokenism, and stereotypes

Digging further into the interview reveals interviewees have a basic grasp of multicultural literature, but their views go against Mansour's and this project's own understanding of the concept. This can be seen, for instance, when they are asked how they would define multicultural literature, and all three state in various ways that it is a type of literature written by someone of a different culture containing characters from different cultures, i.e., when T2 says it is "[...] about places and people and cultures different from one's own, written by someone with a... different cultural background" (see Appendix 3B).

Mansour (2020) explicitly states that for a text to be multicultural it must contain the previously stated five elements, and the author's ethnicity isn't the deciding factor. All three teachers seem to believe a text or piece of literature is multicultural simply if the author has a multicultural background or if the story contains a minority character. This could suggest that chosen texts could contain tokenistic representations of minority characters, which, according to Banks (2004) and Mansour (2020), would be inappropriate to use in practice unless one were to purposely address and analyse the tokenism in class.

Looking at the survey results, however, a mere 18.1% of respondents check for tokenism when choosing and working with literary texts, while 54.6% of respondents check for possible stereotypes. Only 50.4% make an analysis of the text before including them in their lessons (see Appendix 2).

### 5.3. Choosing texts

When the interviewed teachers were asked how they chose the texts they incorporate in lessons, all three named the Common Goals, i.e.,:

**T3:** The lesson plan, honestly, and the goals. [...] I just make sure that I'm ticking all the boxes that I should. (see Appendix 3C)

**T1:** You have the goals [...] and you have to make sure you include that in all of your lessons. (see Appendix 3A)

None of the interviewees analyze texts for appropriateness, such as checking for tokenism or stereotypes, before using them in class. Furthermore, none consider their students' or classes' backgrounds, despite the fact all three have minority students in their classes. This seems to also be true for survey respondents. 88.9% state they have minority students in their classes, with the top two minority groups being ethnic minorities (76.9%) and religious minorities (57.4%). In spite of this, only 46.8% of respondents take their students' social backgrounds into account when they choose literary texts for their lessons. The number is even lower, 43.5%, pertaining to taking students' ethnic backgrounds into consideration. Instead, 61.1% of survey respondents claim that they often follow content from a particular textbook or learning portal. Such is the case with the three interviewed teachers. T1 says, for instance, that aside from choosing content based on the National Goals, he also picks content from the textbook: "I mostly work with Crossroads, [...] it has a normal version and a light version, so it's easy to differentiate" (see Appendix 3A). T2 adds that she follows a textbook "60-70% of the time [...]. I have to pick my battles" (see Appendix 3B).

### 5.4. Observations: Teachers' use of multicultural literature in practice

To further examine teachers' use of multicultural literature in practice, I will analyze my observations. The project's observations took place at different schools with six different classes of varying student profiles. Both 9.A and 7.A constituted exclusively of students with ethnic minority backgrounds, whereas their counterparts, 9.B, 7.B and both 8th grade classes were mainly made up of students that identified with the Danish majority culture. I started my analysis of the observation by organizing my unstructured observations as per Mansour's Process Model and Banks' Framework for Content Integration. Below are excerpts of some of the most salient points from the structured observations.

### *5.4.1. Mansour: Joint Reading*

The 9th grade classes were observed to have worked with various texts from the textbook *CrossRoads*, specifically on the chapters on slavery and racism in the USA (see Appendix 1). During instruction, T1 did not specify whether the class should read in pairs, groups, or individually. 9.A immediately began reading silently and individually, whereas nearly all students in 9.B found a partner or a small group to read the text with, and they discussed the texts for the most part in English. During my first observation of 9.A, T1 left the classroom for 30 minutes; in my second observation of 9.B, T1 was absent for 15 minutes. This may mean that no one is there to facilitate and scaffold students' meetings with the texts as per the Process Model (Mansour & Jacobsen, 2021), which is supported by the fact that approx. half the class promptly stopped reading and began talking about irrelevant topics, whenever T1 left the vicinity.

The 7th grade classes were observed to have worked with the topic of climate change in connection to Earth Day, and this was supplemented by a text on COP26 by the NatGeoKids website, as well as another text with accompanying worksheet from iSL collective. 7.B was also observed to have watched the movie *Free Willy* as an introduction to the Earth Day theme, as they were a lesson behind 7.A. Both classes were instructed to read their texts individually by T2.

The 8th grade classes were observed to have worked with numerous texts from the chapter "Whistle-blowers" on Gyldendal, as well as texts and a video on pop culture from the internet. Both observations ended with the teacher introducing a book report that the classes should make on an illustrated fictional book they had previously read called *The First Rule of Punk* by Cecilia Perez. Only T3 initiated group, pair, or class readings in her lessons with the 8th graders, although the reading of the book was done individually.

One can then surmise that most of the teachers' use of literature in practice goes against Mansour's joint reading recommendation in the second stage of her Process Model. By relegating reading as solo ventures, students miss out on the opportunity to broaden their perspectives on sociocultural topics, thereby risking hindering the development of their ICC, especially with regards to challenging preconceived notions on these topics (Mansour & Jacobsen, 2021).

### 5.4.2. Mansour: Open, authentic questions

“Describe being discriminated against. Have you tried it yourselves?” was a question T1 posed to 9B (see Appendix 1A). This is an example of an authentic, open question that has no predefined answer, is not found in the text, and invites all students to participate. These types of questions, as per Mansour, scaffold students’ understanding of the text, as well as investigates and challenges the narratives presented by the text (Mansour & Jacobsen, 2021). They also make visible minority students’ experiences. T1 was the only teacher who consistently posed such unscripted questions, whereas T2 and T3 had a tendency to follow comprehension questions made specifically for the text that they chose to work with, found on their chosen online portal.

However, T1 does not grab the opportunity to let students reflect over their answers. For instance, the above question was only posed to 9.B – a class made up of mostly Danish students – and not with their counterpart 9.A, which is exclusively made up of students with immigrant minority backgrounds. A minority student from 9.B is the only one who answers:

**S11:** “Yes, by a bus driver. I was trying to buy a ticket and he told me to get off. A Danish girl was behind me also and she bought a ticket also. After that, he closed the doors.”

**T1:** “Okay, that’s racist and horrible. I think that’s the last text we have on mebook.” (see Appendix 1A)

Instead of investigating the issue further, asking input from or inviting other students to share their own experiences as Mansour recommends, T1 glosses over S11’s answer and changes the topic, rendering ineffective the authentic, open question (Mansour & Jacobsen, 2021).

### 5.5. Banks: Contributions and Additions

After having organized the observed teachers’ use of multicultural texts as per Banks’ four levels of integration of multicultural content, it can be seen that all three exhibit a tendency to remain at a mostly contributions and additions level.

One can say all three teachers make use of the contributions level of content integration, since their presentation of cultural texts and content are done in a stereotypical manner (Banks, 2020). T1, for example, only talks about black people and Native Americans in the context of them being slaves

and victims of genocide (see Appendix 1B); and T3 simply presents the topic on spies in the US and UK based on what is shown in Gyldendal.

I have also observed instances where all three teachers made use of the additions level of content integration, wherein cultural content is added to the lessons, but with only the perspective of the majority group. Minority groups present in the cultural content aren't really given a voice and are still relegated to the roles of slaves, etc. (Banks, 2020)

T2, for instance, works with the topics on climate change and Earth Day specifically from a western view without acknowledging what effects these could have in other parts of the world, perhaps even from the home countries of minority students with immigrant backgrounds. Meanwhile, T1 dismisses a minority student's comment on how slavery still exists today as T1 himself does not believe it exists. And while he works with texts that have multicultural content, i.e., experiences of blacks and Native Americans, he simply lets the students read the text and answer the comprehension questions from the textbook along with a few open, authentic questions, instead of searching for additional content not found in the book or addressing the social problems or stereotypes found in the material. Banks discourages the overuse of the contributions and additions approach as they are superficial ways of working with multicultural texts and can be breeding grounds for stereotypes and tokenism (Positive Action, 2021).

Several times, the teachers miss opportunities to elevate a discussion or activity from the contributions and additions level into the transformative level. This is seen in the above cited observations on the discussion of slavery's existence in 9.A as well as during the sharing experiences of discrimination in 9.B. Both times, T1 changed the topic instead of inviting more student perspectives to be heard in order to challenge the class' preconceived notions of the world, which would've stimulated their intercultural skills of self-reflection, openness, and critical thinking (Risager, 2020).

Another instance of missed opportunity is when a minority student is seemingly open to sharing a poem they wrote about discrimination, but because most of the class didn't make the assignment and because the students were too slow in answering, T1 does not let the student share his poem:



3: Transformative	- T1 moves on to the next part of the class' homework, where they have to write and present a poem. Nobody answers. T1: "I wanted you to do the poem so you could be creative." Det er for, at I lærer noget om lyrik. Hvis der ik' er nogen, der har lavet det, så er der ik' nogen, der har lavet det..." S5: "S8 wrote one" T1: "Too late. Nu hør efter..." (Observer's note: failed attempt at level 3)
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(see Appendix 1B)

T2 was also observed to have attempted to adopt the transformative level in their work with the texts on Earth Day when she invited students to write a letter to their local government as a part of COP26's "Year of Climate Action". No one volunteered and she dropped the activity.

As all three teachers remain at the superficial levels of integration of multicultural content, additions and contributions, the mainstream curriculum remains unchallenged, the risk of students' being exposed to content with tokenism and stereotypes persist, and the minority students meet little to no content or characters that reflect, especially positively, their identities and backgrounds (Banks, 2020).

## 5.6. Survey and interview mirror observations

Two questions from the survey were formulated based on Mansour's and Banks' models to check how respondents used multicultural texts in their lessons. For the question based on Mansour's Process Model, barely over half of respondents, 57.0%, incorporate joint reading in their work with multicultural literature, while only 50.5% introduce open, authentic questions. 84.1% follow guide questions from the book during reading discussions (see Appendix 2, question 23). For the question based on Banks' model of content integration, most respondents ticked off activities belonging to the contributions level (see Appendix 2, question 25). This isn't particularly surprising as 41.6% answered they were not familiar with didactic models on how to work with multicultural literature, so teachers may not be equipped to make conscious choices on how to appropriately handle multicultural texts (see Appendix 2, question 21). The interviews of the three teachers suggest as much when asked how they work with multicultural texts, i.e., T1 states, "Mostly [they read] individually. Otherwise, they'd just end up talking about something else" (see Appendix 3A).

## 5.7. Potential challenges on working with multicultural literature

The three interviewees mention that although they acknowledge the potential of multicultural literature as a tool to develop students' ICC, they don't use it in their lessons due to two reasons.

The first is time issues:

**T3:** Mainly due to time constraints. You don't really get a lot of time for it when you've got a syllabus to follow. (see Appendix 3C)

**T1:** Books or novels are very time-consuming. (see Appendix 3A)

**T2:** When I started teaching, I wanted to make my own materials, I wanted to check, analyze texts. [...] It's impossible to do everything. (see Appendix 3B)

The second is outside pressure from either exams or the Common Goals:

**T3:** You've got a syllabus to follow and certain goals to tick off your list. So if you have a class that's not doing well orally or with their writing, which are critical parts of their exams, you might need to do that. (see Appendix 3C)

**T1:** It's not on top of my priority when I have 30 students that I need to pass the exams. (see Appendix 3A)

**T2:** I have a pensum [...] to follow before they graduate, [...] it's important [...] they're prepared and they can talk and communicate as best as they can. (see Appendix 3B)

Despite these challenges, 99.1% of respondents in the survey express that they either agree or strongly agree that multicultural literature contributes to the development of ICC (see Appendix 2, question 19). All three teachers from the interview are of the same opinion:

**T3:** Literature, especially fiction [...] allows you to see things from other perspectives, put yourself in other people's shoes, have more empathy, understanding, tolerance. [...] I would like to think that over time the more exposed they get to literature like um both fiction and non-fiction that it could uh have an effect. [...] But I think in the very little time that I have them and the very little time we have with each topic? It doesn't necessarily make a difference. But I could maybe plant a seed that could grow into something later. (see Appendix 3C)

**T1:** [Minority] pupils [...] need something they can relate to and feel represented by, they can see their own history and culture represented even though they live in Denmark now. (see Appendix 3A)

**T2:** It gives them [...] access to a different world. So you could maybe say that it lets them develop their intercultural competence. It can make them more open and understanding of different people or cultures, even ones they have never met before. (see Appendix 3B)

## 5.8 New Perspectives

Under my observation, the minority figures introduced in T1's lessons were exclusively presented as victims or in the context of fighting against discrimination from a position of inferiority. There was not one instance of positive representation the students could identify with. In other words, the texts and how they were used could risk reinforcing negative stereotypes about minority groups, especially blacks and Native Americans.

In the chapters "*Hvilke billeder møder vi?*" and "*Hvem møder vi, hvem er vi?*" Karen Risager and Lone Svarstad (2020, pp. 117-152) discuss how representing minority cultures is inadequate. One must also account for how cultures are represented to avoid misrepresentation, not just in literature, but also in other genres and modalities. In their analyses of several textbooks and online portals for the subjects English, German, and French, various visual and textual depictions of ethnic minority cultures contained clichéd stereotypes. Students were often not invited to discuss the images or the stereotypes; they were simply given comprehension questions to check whether they understood the text. Risager and Svarstad stress there should be more focus on a discursive approach where language teachers address which discourses on ethnicity, race, gender, etc. are present in the material and are prevalent in society and how/why certain minority groups are associated with specific discourses. Such discursive action has a "*dannelsespotentiale*" (Risager & Svarstad, 2020, p. 137-138) as it can lead to decentering, the process of seeing the world from varied perspectives.

Another issue Risager and Svarstad (2020) indicate in their analyses is how most texts in the learning materials are primarily didacticized, depriving students of authentic reading experiences from authentic texts such as those found in, i.e., multicultural literature: "*hvor interkulturel er undervisningen, når de materialer, der bruges, overvejende er konstruerede tekster til*

*undervisning og ikke udtryk for reelle kulturmøder?”* (p. 141). Hence, it is vital students work with realistic, diverse textual and visual representations of society, specifically of marginalized minority groups, so they develop ICC and learn to communicate successfully in cultural meetings, one of the goals under the competence area *Kultur og samfund* (UVM, 2019). This stands to reason that the benefits of working with multicultural literature and content not only apply to 7th-9th grade, but also to other grade levels, perhaps even in other subjects.

Risager and Svarstad (2020, p. 117), however, point out how some teachers – not just in foreign language subjects but in other subjects as well – may distance themselves from the work needed to incorporate multicultural literature and content as they may be unsure how to deal with taboo topics, i.e., racism, political correctness, etc. T3 in her interview mentions how half of her colleagues are too afraid to touch on politically charged sociocultural topics such as the use of racial slurs, whereas the other half chastise her for including these in her lessons, especially with the addition of minority group perspectives. There have been numerous public scandals about teachers using racial slurs (Harder, 2021; Kragelund, 2022), one in which students wrote an open letter to their teachers expressing hurt over the use of said slurs (Anwari & Sharif, 2020), and about schools drawing criticism for their insistence on employing racist depictions of minority groups such as the blackface scandal at Herning Gymnasium (Haislund, 2019).

This suggests that there indeed may be a benefit to, firstly, integrating multicultural literature and content to the current curriculum across grade levels to boost students' ICC in cultural meetings and ensure realistic representations of society are present in lessons; and, secondly, to updating teachers' knowledge and repertoire of skills to make them more capable of properly tackling multicultural content and aware of the impact of representation on students' learning and overall development.

## 7. Conclusion

Both the teachers in the interviews and surveys express that it is important to incorporate multicultural literature, especially fiction, in one's lessons, as working with it has the potential to develop intercultural skills needed to foster ICC such as tolerance, empathy, broadening of

perspectives, and openness towards other cultures. At the same time, a picture emerges that a lot of teachers consciously opt out of including multicultural literature in their lessons in favor of textbooks and learning portals.

So how do teachers use and didactically approach multicultural literature? The answer seems to be sparingly and with a bit of skepticism. The interviewed teachers implied working with multicultural texts, especially authentic fictive texts, would take away time from preparing the students for their upcoming exams in English, and would risk them not being able to fully go through their pensums. There is thus a discrepancy between what the teachers do in practice, and what they think is best, in relation to creating opportunities for students to develop their ICC with multicultural literature.

Despite 88.9% of respondents having minority students, less than half take into account students' social and ethnic backgrounds (46.8% and 43.5% respectively) when selecting texts for their lessons. This does not live up to the requirement of the Public School Act, which specifies that lessons must be based on the experiences, perspectives and backgrounds of *all* students. In other words, less than half of survey respondents actively choose texts or content that represents all students in their class, which means minorities are in particular risk of not being exposed to positive representations of their cultures and may be relegated to reading texts with stereotypical or tokenistic depictions of minority groups, i.e., as witnessed in my observations of two 9th grade classes.

Even in the instances where multicultural texts were used by the survey respondents and observed/interviewed teachers, the texts were not handled appropriately during lessons if one is to base this on Mansour's and Banks' recommendations. 41.6% of survey respondents express they are unfamiliar with didactic models on working with multicultural literature, which is underscored by the fact 57.0% and 50.5% of respondents respectively make use of joint readings and open, authentic questions in their work with multicultural texts, while 85.2% employ activities that lie on the lowest level of Banks' four levels of content integration. This was explicitly seen during observations of six different classes from 7th-9th grade, wherein all three teachers chose individual readings of texts, neglected to ask open, authentic questions, and used activities considered to be

on the contributions and additions level. This suggests that students do not get ample opportunity to become exposed to differing perspectives and deconstruct preconceived notions of the world, which is essential for teaching intercultural skills. In other words, not only are minority groups underrepresented in the texts teachers choose to work with, minority voices and perspectives are also not given enough space to be heard in class discussions.

Moreover, the three teachers' definition of multicultural literature also stands in contrast with that of this project's and Mansour's, as the teachers mainly consider the author's and text characters' cultural background to be the deciding factor on whether a text is multicultural or not. This could pose a risk of teachers choosing texts which aren't actually multicultural, and which have tokenistic and/or stereotypical views on minority groups. The survey results seem to suggest this could be a possibility, with 50.4%, 45.4%, and 82.2% of respondents respectively stating they do not analyze texts, check for tokenism, or check for stereotypes before using a text in a lesson.

As to the question of which challenges do working with multicultural literature entail for the English teacher's practice, there are two main components to consider – political and practical.

Interviewed teachers indicate they deprioritize fictional multicultural literature, particularly books or novels, in favor of shorter texts, didacticized texts, nonfiction texts, and communicative or grammar activities. This is in part due to a sense of obligation of having to tick off a list of goals in connection with the Common Goals for English. This renders teachers short for time and with little leeway or flexibility in terms of preparing and executing lessons that don't veer too far off from the planned pensum.

Thus, it can be concluded that many teachers are aware that multicultural literature can contribute to promoting students' ICC and empowering minority students, which could potentially improve their overall learning and well-being. Unfortunately, they lack sufficient time, resources, or knowledge to properly integrate multicultural texts in their lessons in a way that does not foster tokenism and uphold stereotypes, so they rely on textbooks and online learning portals for most of their content and focus most of their lessons on preparing students for their exams. Hence, the current use and approach to multicultural literature do not currently fully live up to requirements

of the Public School Act, as many teachers do not – due to the above cited reasons – assess, choose, and work with materials which correspond to the needs and requisites of individual students.

## 8. Recommendations

Several issues have emerged during the execution of this project regarding the usage of multicultural literature in schools. On the basis of collected empirical data and analysis thereof, I have drawn up the following recommended measures of action:

1. The empirical evidence has shown there is a discrepancy between the English teachers' normative approach to multicultural literature and their descriptive actions in their work with said texts in practice. According to the teachers themselves, the issue stems from a lack of time and resources.

The proposed action here is to train teachers in how to work with multicultural literature, as the entire concept is still new and there currently seems to be a misconception that working with multicultural literature, especially longer fictive genres like books, would affect students' learning in other competencies and derail preparation for the exams. If teachers are up to date with these approaches, they can learn to effectively incorporate multicultural texts in their lessons to address other aspects of EFL learning, such as grammar and oracy, whilst providing students with realistic representations of the world. As the interviewed teachers seemed to be quite bound to the Common Goals when they plan their lessons, teachers should also be reminded that said goals are actually quite flexible – they could easily use multicultural literature and content to stimulate the required competence areas on written and oral communication and culture and society. This would expose students to a diverse collection of authentic material throughout their scholastic years and give them an opportunity to notice different perspectives of the world *while* developing their communicative skills. This, in turn, can train their critical awareness and attitudes of openness and empathy, so they are able to interact with people from different cultures during cultural meetings (Risager

- & Svarstad, 2020). In this way, students will be able to develop their ICC as world citizens.
2. Although the number of minority students in schools is continually increasing, some teachers seem to not consider their background and perspectives when choosing content for English lessons, and seem to not be aware of the significance of representation for students' learning and well-being.

To counteract this, I propose teachers be explicitly made aware of the legal requirement to accommodate *all* students' needs and prerequisites during the organization, planning, and execution of lessons as stipulated by paragraph 18 of The Public School Act. It may also benefit teachers to enroll in a course on multicultural literature to inform them of its benefits and potentials, especially regarding representation, and to develop their own ICC. As the study of multicultural literature in Denmark is particularly new, it ought to be the Ministry of Education's responsibility to produce and offer such a course to educate teachers how to integrate multicultural literature in their lessons in a way that is neither stereotypical or tokenistic, but rather contributive to students' ICC development.



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