



HÖGSKOLAN
I HALMSTAD

Teacher Education (Upper Secondary School) 300 hp

EXAMENSARBETE



English and Culture: Learning About Us and Them

A Study About Teachers' Conceptions and Teaching of Culture in the English Classroom

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English for Students in Teacher Education (Upper Secondary School) 15 hp

Halmstad 2017-06-18

Abstract

In this essay, four teachers of English as a foreign language were interviewed about their conceptions of culture and language. The purpose was to investigate what they consider important to teach their students about culture and how they attempt to achieve this in practice. Furthermore, it was discussed whether the teaching of culture can be improved. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, using theory about culture taught from either a product perspective, as observable behaviors, facts and information, or from a process perspective, as values, attitudes and empathy with otherness. The results showed that the teachers generally aimed to teach culture from a process perspective, promoting empathy, deconstructing stereotypes and teaching about the students' own culture as well as cultural features in other parts of the world. They also listed some methods of achieving this aim. However, many of the teaching methods were more centered around facts and information, particularly about national cultures. This suggested an approach more focused on culture as a product, which may be detrimental to the voiced goals of teaching culture as a process.

Keywords: Culture, language, EFL, interculturality, product perspective, process perspective.

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1. Introduction

The significance of culture when teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), and its connection to language in general, is something that can be discussed ad infinitum. The Swedish Board of Education's general introduction for English in the 2011 curriculum states that English can:

...increase the individual's opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in global studies and working life. Knowledge of English can also provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts, and greater understanding of different ways of living. (The Swedish Board of Education, 2011, pp. 53).

This is also reflected in the learning goals, which state that the students should develop knowledge of:

...living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. Teaching should encourage students' curiosity in language and culture, and give them the opportunity to develop plurilingualism where skills in different languages interact and support each other. (ibid.)

Numerous studies on English teachers' views of culture and language have been made both in Sweden and internationally. To my knowledge however, few such studies have been made after the implementation of the 2011 upper secondary school curriculum in Sweden. Therefore, it is relevant to study whether the new curriculum has affected how culture is taught by Swedish English teachers and how these results compare to previous research.

Consequently, the aim of this study is to examine what conceptions four upper secondary school teachers have of culture when teaching English. How do they interpret and realize the formulations in the curriculum concerning the study of culture in English-speaking parts of the world? This was done by interviewing the teachers about what they focus on when they teach culture, what they aim for the students to learn and why, and how they work in the classroom to reach these goals. Based on the purpose of the study the following questions were formulated:

What conceptions of culture can teachers have in the context of teaching English as a foreign language and how do they translate this into practice?

How may the teaching of culture in EFL be improved?

In the following sections I will discuss previous research on the topic and how this essay is positioned in relation to these studies. Secondly, the theoretical framework and method used will

be introduced and discussed. Next, the empirical material will be analyzed and discussed. Finally, the essay concludes with a summary of the results and discussion, a review of the research questions and suggestions for future research. The analysis of the interviews shows that the interviewed teachers expressed that their objective when teaching culture in EFL is to promote intercultural competence and tolerance, but that their methods often focus on transmission of facts and information. To achieve a teaching of culture that is more focused on values, empathy and encounters, more time and resources, supplementary education for the teachers, and a shift in teacher focus from facts about nations may be necessary.

2. Literature Review

Within the chosen field of research, several studies have been conducted on how teachers view culture in the context of EFL. A commonly used method is to interview teachers about how they teach culture or connections between culture and language. The reviewed studies discuss conflicts between traditional methods and conceptions about culture and more modern ideas suggested by research. The topics vary between what to teach and how, what language goals to set and how students should compare different cultures with their own.

In the article “‘We Would Have to Invent the Language We are Supposed to Teach’: The Issue of English as Lingua Franca in Language Education in Germany” by Helene Decke-Cornill (2002), teachers from two types of schools, one vocational and one university-preparatory, were interviewed. The teachers were asked if they preferred teaching English with a traditional focus on British and American language culture or teaching the language as a global communication language, referred to as lingua franca. The results showed that the teachers in vocational schools, although not previously familiar with the concept, were more comfortable with the idea of teaching English as a lingua franca than the teachers of the more academically oriented schools. The reason was that these vocational teachers said that few of their students were likely to ever travel to Britain or the US and therefore teaching English as lingua franca was more suitable. In the present study, the interviewed teachers will be asked what target language, if any, they have for their students and their answers will be discussed in relation to Decke-Cornill’s study.

In her dissertation *Kultur i Språkundervisning*, Eva Gagnestam (2003) aims to contribute new knowledge of how culture is perceived in EFL by Swedish teacher students, vocationally active

teachers and upper secondary school students. Using a constructivist and sociocultural theoretical framework, the author studies conceptions of: what culture is; the relation between culture and language; and the meaning of intercultural competence, among other topics. The empirical data was collected through both interviews with future teachers and surveys with working teachers and upper secondary school students. The results showed that many of the participating teachers and teacher students felt unsure of how to teach culture in their EFL classes. Furthermore, half of the teachers in the study expressed a need for change in how culture is treated in EFL classrooms. What these teachers requested were ways of teaching the culture that permeates everything, such as ways of life and mindsets, that is: a holistic perspective rather than a focus on details (Gagnestam, 2003, pp. 203). In her discussion, Gagnestam (2003, pp. 235) advocates a reformed English education, in which focus is shifted from pure facts and realia to discussion of attitudes, mindsets and values, as far as culture is concerned. Furthermore, teachers should use the students' own cultures as platforms for reference and instead of concentrating solely on the traditional national cultures of Great Britain and the United States, English should be taught and learned as a global multicultural lingua franca. In the present study, the interviewees' answers will be discussed considering Gagnestam's results and her suggested improvements.

In another study, Eva Larzén-Östermark (2008) aims to explore what conceptions Swedish and Finnish grade 7-9 teachers have of interculturality as a part of teaching EFL. To achieve this purpose, three research questions were formulated: How do teachers interpret the concept culture in EFL-teaching; how do they specify the cultural objectives of their teaching; and what do they do to attain these objectives? To gather empirical data, interviews were conducted with 13 different teachers using the variables sex, teaching experience, and time spent abroad to ensure a degree of heterogeneity between the subjects. The results were categorized in terms of three different orientations expressed by teachers. These orientations ranged from the conveying of information and facts about English-speaking countries to promoting empathy and understanding of otherness in different cultures. Most of the interviewed teachers tended to view culture in a traditional way and therefore focused on transmission of information about English-speaking countries. Few reflected on how culture could be introduced in a manner that developed the students' understanding of otherness. This study is relevant for the present essay since it employs the same method and similar research questions. Therefore, there is merit in discussing the results of the two studies in relation to each other.

The understanding of otherness just mentioned can be obtained through understanding of one's own culture and comparing with one's own experiences (Larzén-Östermark, 2008, pp. 536). In the article "'Swedishness' as a Norm for Learners of English in Swedish Schools: A Study of National and Local Objectives and Criteria in Compulsory Schools", Jörgen Tholin (2012) writes about how this comparison is made and what is used as a reference point. In his study, the Swedish curricula for EFL in lower secondary school from 1994 and 2000 are analyzed with the purpose of determining if they are ethnically biased. Ethnic bias is defined as a situation where Swedish culture, language or "Swedishness" are norms when comparing with English culture, which may hinder students who have not lived in Sweden for a long time. By studying how criteria were worded in the local steering documents of a hundred different schools, Tholin analyzed how the national curriculum was implemented on an individual school level. The results showed that nearly a third of the schools studied had criteria and objectives for English language studies that used Swedish conditions, the Swedish language and "Swedishness" as their reference point. The conclusion was that students with Swedish backgrounds have better preconditions to fulfill the learning objectives and achieve higher grades compared to students with other cultural backgrounds. Although the steering documents have changed since Tholin's study and schools no longer have local learning objectives, this ethnic bias may still be present, depending on how teachers implement the curriculum. For the present study, what the teachers use as a norm when comparing other cultures with the students' own experiences is a relevant aspect of the research question concerning how culture is being taught.

The conceptions and teaching of culture in Swedish and European EFL classrooms are areas that have been studied meticulously over the last 10-15 years. However, research conducted since the implementation of the 2011 curriculum is more scarce. The reviewed literature indicates several potential areas of development concerning how culture is taught in EFL classrooms. Thus, there is relevance in studying whether teachers still tend to adopt a more traditional perspective on culture or if a change towards a more dynamic, holistic view can be discerned. Such a view would correspond to the curriculum definition of knowledge in English as an opportunity to gain new perspectives on the world, understanding of different ways of life and to participate in globalized education and working life (The Swedish Board of Education, 2011, pp. 53).

3. Methodology

To answer the research questions of the study, interviewing teachers was chosen as a suitable method. In doing so, the teachers' ideas about culture and how they teach culture in practice was made visible. By also asking the teachers to give suggestions on how to improve the teaching, and compare their teaching with what is advocated in previous research, the method also appeared promising in terms of answering the second research question. In this chapter, the theoretical framework that was used to analyze the teachers' answers and the method and material used will be discussed.

3.1 Theoretical Background

To analyze the interviews in which the teachers describe their views on culture, theory that helps to define different conceptions of culture is necessary. In this chapter, the terms *high culture* and *anthropological culture*, which are two distinct understandings of culture, will be explained. Furthermore, the scientific debate on what culture is can be divided into two perspectives. The first one views culture as a product and the second one views it as a process. These perspectives will in this chapter be explained and placed in an EFL context, both in terms of content and language. Finally, a theoretical model that connects these two orientations with the didactical questions of what, how and why will be introduced and later used in the analysis chapter.

3.1.1 Definition of culture

The meaning of the word "culture" is not always clear since it is such a broad expression that can signify a wide variety of phenomena. Andersson, Persson & Thavenius (1999 cited in Gagnestam, 2003, pp. 14) highlight two distinct definitions of culture. The first definition can be referred to as *high culture* and encapsulates the established art forms, such as literature or music. In this context culture is something that is separated from daily life and easily observable and definable as culture. It should be noted that high culture in this context does not signify subjective quality as in defining different works of culture as high or low. The term encapsulates all culture that is the result of human creativity.

The other form of culture is what is referred to as *anthropological culture*. This definition includes humans' ways of living, social behaviors, and everyday lives. Since it is such a major part of our day-to-day lives, it is more difficult to observe and analyze. In the present study, focus is on

anthropological culture, namely ways of life in different parts of the world where English is used, since this appears to be an important part of the curriculum goal highlighted in the introduction of this essay. However, omitting high culture entirely seems counter-productive since both types of culture affect each other. It is my understanding that the products of high culture can be reflections of the everyday life that is anthropological culture and can in turn affect the lives and values of people. Therefore, both concepts may be discussed, depending on the teachers' answers.

3.1.2 Culture as a product or process

According to Wendt (2010, pp. 287) there are two different conceptions of anthropological culture in the current scientific debate. From one perspective, culture is viewed as a distinguishable and objectively describable system. The other perspective sees culture as a series of dynamically developing events that can only be described as momentary perceptions. The first of these perspectives defines culture as a product and the second defines culture as a process. The culture-as-a-product perspective focuses on national cultures, which are seen as unchanging and homogenous and from this perspective, it becomes natural to speak about, for instance, national culture such as the US and American identity (Lundahl, 2012, pp.122-123). The culture-as-a-process perspective instead focuses on conceptions, attitudes and varying aspects of cultures. According to this perspective, humans do not carry one identity but several. Cultural diversity, change and empathy with other worldviews is emphasized (ibid). Within this perspective, the concept of British or American identity is problematic since it differs immensely between each individual citizen.

Within the product perspective culture can be defined in two different ways. It can be observable events and actions, such as traditions, customs and habits. Focus is on the behavior itself rather than on what causes it or under what circumstances it takes place. (Robinson, 1988 cited in Gagnestam, 2003, pp. 15). In an EFL context, examples could be what Americans do in their spare time or how the British celebrate Christmas. The other definition instead targets underlying structures that control observable actions, with the goal of understanding social behaviors and their function in societies. By observing these behaviors and understanding why people act the way they do, the learner is assumed to gain an increased understanding and tolerance (ibid, pp. 16). For example, in an EFL context, the concept of the road trip as a popular spare time activity in the US could be understood in the context of the historical and economic significance of the car for the country.

The process perspective on culture also employs two different definitions (ibid). The first definition focuses on culture as an internal process by which information is organized and interpreted. Hence, this process is not observable but takes place within the person who learns a cultural behavior or performs a cultural act. The second definition sees culture as a dynamic system in which observable external events are combined with the internal process of interpreting this input to create meaning. This process is affected by the individual's experiences since these affect interpretation, which in turn affects future experiences and so forth. If this definition is applied to teaching, cultural understanding is the process by which the student combines observed culture with their own experiences to create meaning (ibid).

In this essay, the teacher's answers will be analyzed on whether they tend to focus on external behaviors and what causes them or the internal processes of their students, their experiences and attitudes.

3.1.3 Teaching of culture in EFL

Before the Second World War, the teaching of high culture generally was held in high regard in EFL classrooms. After the war however, its importance decreased as increased global trade and diplomacy, coupled with large scale immigration, generated a growing need for intercultural communication. Due to this, interest in anthropological culture and different ways of life increased, and this was reflected in the EFL classroom (Kramsch, 2001, pp. 202). Originally, the product perspective had a dominant role in how this intercultural communication was taught. Focus was on transmitting facts and information about English-speaking countries and teaching non-English speakers to imitate the behavior of native speakers (Kramsch, 2001, pp. 205). However, this approach has lately begun to transform into a more process-oriented teaching of culture. Rather than teaching facts and culturally appropriate behaviors, focus has shifted to social and historical contexts that have given present cultural phenomena their meaning in cross-cultural contexts (ibid). Furthermore, the traditional view of national and cultural attributes as static and defined by geographical borders has been criticized as insufficient to reflect the complexities of the current global age, in which individuals may live in multiple contexts and adopt a multitude of identities.

In addition to a change in content, this transition can also be seen in the language that is currently taught. Initially, facts about and behaviors of certain English-speaking countries, mainly the United Kingdom and later the United States, were in focus. Similarly, the lingual characteristics and the

standard dialects of speakers from these countries were considered the ideal for EFL learners in German classrooms (Dekke-Cornill, 2002, pp. 252). This idealization of a British standard of language is not limited to Germany but exists in several countries. It has been criticized for contributing to a form of linguistic chauvinism or class hierarchy, in which the idealization of the British English leads to marginalization and depreciation of other varieties of the language (Modiano, 1999 cited in Gagnestam, 2003, pp. 67). This ideal of standard British English is challenged by a school of teaching English that puts more weight on intercultural communication, often between two speakers of whom neither are native English speakers. From such a perspective, in which English is first and foremost considered an auxiliary language, or *lingua franca*, near-native proficiency loses its importance and larger variation in language is accepted (ibid, 68-69). It can also be argued that there is a division between written and spoken English and that written English is becoming increasingly standardized while spoken English is much more diverse and multi-faceted (Trudgill and Hanna, 1994 cited in Gagnestam, 2003, pp 67-68).

An attempt to categorize how various EFL teachers perceive culture and what they want to convey to their students has been made by Larzen-Östermark (2008) in her results chapter. Based on the interviewed teachers' answers to what they think is important when teaching culture, why it is important and how they teach it, they were divided into three different orientations. Within the cognitive orientation, culture is viewed as factual knowledge and teaching it is defined as transmission of these facts to be memorized and transferred into useful knowledge of foreign countries. In the action-related orientation, culture is seen as a set of skills in socio-linguistics and social interaction with other cultures. The aim is to prepare students for future intercultural interactions and help them avoid "cultural blunders". Finally, within the affective orientation, culture is perceived as a bi-directional perspective. This means that the goal is to teach students to observe their own culture from another perspective and to empathize with otherness, not just in English-speaking countries, but in general (ibid, pp. 533-534). Combining these orientations with the didactic questions of what, how and why, allowed for a model of the teachers' conceptions which can be seen below.

Picture 1. (Larzen-Östermark, 2005, pp. 534)

Orientation Focus	Cognitive orientation	Action orientation	Affective orientation
1. WHAT? Teachers' conceptions of culture	a. Factual knowledge	b. Skills	c. Bi-directional perspective
2. WHY? Teachers' beliefs about cultural objectives	a. Providing general background information	b. Preparing for future intercultural encounters	c. Promoting tolerance and empathy
3. HOW? Teachers' classroom practice	a. Pedagogy of Information ----- Teacher in centre	b. Pedagogy of Preparation ----- Teacher and pupil in centre	c. Pedagogy of Encounter ----- Pupil in centre

My interpretation of the model is that both the cognitive and the action-related orientations are inclined towards the product perspective of culture. Both orientations favor observable events but the first focuses on facts and information, whereas the second is more skill-focused. Furthermore, the action-related orientation appears more communicative, while the cognitive orientation appears to be more focused on the transmission of information. The affective orientation seems to be more inclined than the other two towards a process perspective on culture, since it does not focus on external behaviors but rather internal conceptions among the students. Like the action-related orientation it could be classified as being communicative but instead of teaching observable behaviors and skills it focuses on empathy and understanding of other cultures, which in turn may improve intercultural communication. The connection between the different orientations in the model and the two distinct ideals of near native-speaker proficiency and lingua franca is not always entirely clear. According to Gagnestam (2003, pp. 236) to achieve the goal of an intercultural teaching of English, teachers should move away from the goal of teaching the students to sound like a native speaker and instead focus on global communication. It seems likely that teachers who focus on preparing their students for intercultural encounters or who promote empathy and tolerance would be more inclined towards teaching English as lingua franca. This will be discussed further in relation to the interviewees' answers.

In the present study, Larzen-Östermark's model will help to analyze what the teachers interviewed say about their practice of teaching culture in EFL. It is important to note, however, that the model should not be perceived as a complete representation of how culture is taught and perceived. It is quite possible that one teacher may express ideas that correlate to several different orientations. Therefore, the purpose of utilizing the model is not to fit each interviewed teacher into a category but rather to facilitate the analysis by providing a theoretical foundation of terms and concepts.

3.2 Participants

To collect an appropriate amount of empiric material for the analysis, it was deemed appropriate to interview four different upper secondary school teachers. Since teachers working at the same schools may influence each other's teaching by, for instance, sharing lesson plans, teachers who worked at different schools were asked to participate. This was done with the aim of achieving greater variation in the interviewees' answers. Consequently, several teachers from different schools were invited to participate in the study, of which four teachers from two different schools accepted. When contacting teachers, no other criteria were applied than that they should be certified and currently work as English teachers. Three of the participating teachers were female and one was male. In the essay, they will be referred to as Louise, Jennifer, Emma, and Anders. Emma and Louise received their teaching diplomas in the 1980s and have worked as teachers for roughly 35 years. Anders has worked as a teacher for 22 years, and became licensed in the year 2000. Finally, Jennifer became licensed in 2006 and has worked actively as a teacher for 9 years.

3.3 Collection and presentation of material

The goal of the interviews was to acquire an image of each individual teacher's view on the topic of culture in the EFL classroom while keeping the interviews similar enough to retain a degree of comparability. To achieve this, qualitative, semi-structured interviews were chosen as an appropriate method. According to Bryman (2011), in a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of specific themes or topics that should be discussed at some time in the interview. These themes should be sorted logically to give some structure to the interview, but depending on how the interviewee chooses to formulate his or her answers, the researcher should be prepared to adjust the order. Flexibility on the researcher's end is vital since the emphasis of the method is on the interviewee's comprehension and interpretation of the questions asked. The person being

interviewed is allowed freedom to discuss what they consider important to explain and understand events, patterns and behaviors (Bryman, 2011, pp. 415).

In the collection of data for this study, a list of questions was prepared before the interviews (Appendix 1). They were sorted so that the interview started with questions that required the teachers to contemplate culture and its connections to language in general. The following questions were more oriented towards culture in the context of teaching English, both concerning language and content, and culture in the English curriculum. Finally, the teachers were asked about what challenges they faces when teaching English in EFL and if they had any suggestions for improvement. Consequently, all interviews were similar in that they were initiated in the same way, but depending on what the teachers discussed the order of the questions could vary and different follow-up questions would be asked. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded. The purpose of this was twofold. Firstly, it ensured that the teacher's exact wording could be used later in the analysis, decreasing the risk of misinterpretation on my end affecting the results. Secondly, it allowed me to focus entirely on what the teachers were saying during the interviews and made it easier to ask follow-up questions. The interviews were conducted in Swedish with the teachers that were native Swedish speakers. The reasoning behind this was that it would make it easier for them to express their thoughts and make them more comfortable and expressive during the interviews. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed in their entirety and the excerpts quoted in the essay were translated to English by me. In the translations, words and phrases, such as "you know", that were deemed redundant were omitted to facilitate reading.

3.4 Ethical Principles

It is of the utmost importance to adhere ethical principles for research when planning and conducting a study. The researcher must continuously consider the general criterion that states that participants should be protected from any harm caused by the study (The Swedish Research Council, 2011, pp. 18). What constitutes harm in this context may be unclear. Some aspects that may be relevant are physical injury, impairment to personal development, lowered self-esteem, and stress (Bryman, 2011). In the present study, physical harm seems highly unlikely. However, there is always the risk that the interviewees may feel stressed, accused or misunderstood during the interviews, which emphasizes the need for the researcher to be mindful of how the questions are formulated and how to behave during the interview.

In addition to this general rule, there are four ethical principles to follow when conducting the study: The principle of information; the principle of consent; the principle of confidentiality; and the principle of fair use (Bryman, 2011, pp. 131-132). To fulfill these principles, the participants were informed before the interviews about the purpose of the study, the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation and that their answers would only be used for the purposes of the study. To ensure confidentiality all names of people and places have been altered in the essay. Allowing anonymity can make it more likely that the interviewees speak freely and honestly about the topics. However, it also has the effect that they do not receive any credit for their methods and ideas. Therefore, it may be worth considering in future studies to allow the teachers to choose for themselves if they want to be anonymous or not.

3.4 Limitations of the Method

Since the scope of this study is limited to interviews with four teachers, any conclusions about teachers in general cannot be drawn. What the study offers is some insight into how these teachers teach about culture in EFL, what obstacles may appear and suggestions on how to teach culture in a way that promotes bi-directional perspectives. Another potential limitation to the method, as with all qualitative methods, is that the analysis of the results will be based on my interpretation of the teachers' answers and the theory that is used. This may have a negative impact on the replicability of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the teachers' answers will be presented, analyzed and discussed in connection to theory and previous research. The chapter is divided into five subchapters that are based on the interview questions and which discuss different aspects of teaching culture in EFL. The first part is about the teachers' own thoughts on what culture is and its connection to language. The next part focuses on the teachers' conceptions of what it is important for the students to learn about culture, why it is important and how the teachers try to achieve these goals in practice. The third part focuses on what language goals the teachers have for their students and how these connect to culture. Fourthly, the practice used by the teachers when the students are to compare their own experiences with other cultures is examined. Finally, suggestions on how the teaching of culture

can be improved are given based on the teachers' own requests and ideas and on what previous research proposes.

4.1 Conceptions of culture and its connection to language

When asked about their immediate thoughts when they heard the word culture, all the teachers considered it an extensive and complex concept, with a wide variety of meanings. Jennifer initially expressed a product perspective on culture, both by naming specific behaviors and the underlying factors behind them: "Culture can be religion, sport, can be traditions and customs, in a country. It can be, norms in general, what governs how one behaves." In her reasoning, there is also a connection between culture and nationality, which further signifies a product-oriented view of culture. Louise expressed similar thoughts, but she immediately connected culture to language as the context in which language is used. To exemplify what she means she sees culture in relation to language as "how it [the language] is used, when and where, register, information about the people who speak it, where in the world." Initially, Jennifer and Louise's own conceptions of culture seem to lean towards a product perspective. They both express thoughts about culture as facts and information, which corresponds to a cognitive orientation on Larzen-Östermark's model. Louise also mentions different registers, how to communicate in different contexts and different sociolects as important aspects of culture, which may indicate a tendency towards the action-related orientation that focuses on communicative skills. Emma on the other hand, specifically expressed that to her, culture is "intercultural learning" and "intercultural competence". She defined this as learning about one's own culture and about other cultures simultaneously to enable unifying encounters between different cultures. This view of culture appears less focused on information and more concerned with the internal learning process and the acquisition of a bi-directional perspective. Anders simply stated that to him, culture entails basically everything, from literature and music to traditions and society. He also stated that because of this, he does not think that it is possible to have a lesson that does not include culture in some way.

In addition to the examples of anthropological culture the teachers named in the previous paragraph, each of them also mentioned examples of high culture in some manner. While neither Anders or Emma expressed any distinction between anthropological culture and high culture, the latter was defined by Jennifer as culture that is "entertainment" and by Louise as culture that is "consumed". Jennifer made the observation that in her experience, students, when asked about

culture, tend to define it from an anthropological perspective over a high culture perspective, while adults tend to do the opposite. She did not however, express any possible causes for this. Possibly, the younger generation has encountered more anthropological culture in school due to the shift in interest from high culture to anthropological culture because of increased globalization that is mentioned by Kramsch (2001, pp. 202).

All four teachers expressed that there is a clear connection between culture and language. As previously mentioned, Louise saw culture as something that provided context for the language. She also stated that language is directly affected by culture:

Because of the way we use language one can say ‘this is the way it is’, ‘this means that’ and ‘this word is used like this’, but since English is a world language that can of course be entirely different things in different places /.../ how do we know if this is an American or a British author? We have no idea, but if you know, you can see it immediately in the spelling. That has to do with the language and it of course also signals that there are certain dissimilarities.

In this case geography and/or nationality affect the language in terms of spelling, vocabulary and meaning. Jennifer highlighted that affiliation with different social groups also affects language, with “street-culture” as an example. She also stated that even though it is not their first language, her students’ English was affected by their culture, in the sense that they bring the informal language they use outside of school into the classroom. According to Anders, language is constantly changing and is influenced by other cultures. As an example, he mentioned London, where previously a majority spoke *received pronunciation*, which is a form of standardized British English, but where the majority now speaks English with some form of accent. For Emma, the connection between the two was fundamental. Culture in her opinion not only provides a context for language, but they are in fact inseparable and they affect each other constantly.

4.2 Teaching Culture: What, Why and How?

When asked what they wanted their students to learn about culture in relation to English language learning, Louise and Jennifer’s answers differed somewhat from their general conceptions of culture. The goal was not to learn information about different expressions of culture, such as traditions and customs. Instead, this information was perceived as a means to an end. Jennifer said that her focus is to try to nuance the students’ image of the world and Sweden:

We get this image from media that everyone is so poor and miserable around us and if there is another culture it is portrayed as colorful, or colored by religion /.../ I want to highlight these nuances in the sense of that India has a middle class just like us and they lead similar lives’.

This quote indicates an attempt to distance the classroom work from stereotypical and exotic images of other cultures. In that sense, since the aim appears to be empathy with other cultures, focus is on similarities rather than spectacular differences. Thus, the most important thing for the students to learn according to Jennifer appears to be a bi-directional perspective on culture within the affective orientation according to Larzén-Östermark's model.

This bi-directional approach was voiced by Louise as well. According to her, empathy with other cultures can be gained through learning the language and by “walking a mile in someone else's shoes”—in this case a native English speaker, from anywhere in the world where English is spoken daily. In doing so, she believes the students may distance themselves from any assumptions that “our way of thinking is the right way” and become more open, curious and receptive to new ideas. A notable distinction between Jennifer and Louise's thoughts on how to achieve the bi-directional goal is that while Jennifer emphasizes facts and information, Louise instead stresses the language itself as governing of our way of thinking. It is difficult to place either teacher in a bracket on the teaching practice dimension of Larzén-Östermark's model. While both have the expressed goal of teaching their students empathy for other cultures, Jennifer's method can be described as pedagogy of information, teaching the students facts about other cultures, whereas Louise seems to focus more on pedagogy of encounter, encouraging the students to put themselves in the shoes of a person from another culture. Notably Emma, who in the previous chapter seemed prone to a process rather than product perspective on culture, wanted her students to learn as much as possible about behaviors, traditions and societal life in the target culture. However, as with the previous two teachers, this information itself was not the goal. The purpose for the students was, as she expressed it, partly to become familiar with other cultures and partly to learn things about themselves: “For me, interculturality is learning about oneself”.

Apparently, one of the most important lessons Emma, Jennifer and Louise want their students to learn is the ability to critically scrutinize their own preconceptions and stereotypes, not only about other cultures, but equally important, about their own culture as well. This, as previously mentioned, corresponds well with the bi-directional perspective on culture, where knowledge of why representatives of the familiar culture and the target culture act the way they do is seen to enable deeper understanding of similarities and differences (Larzén-Östermark, 2008, pp. 536). When asked why this ability was important Jennifer expressed it as a matter of countering

ignorance: “It is ignorant to go around thinking that we Swedes are something that we are not. Because we live in our little bubble and to me it is imperialistic, and arrogant, and that is something I want to try to abolish.” According to Emma, learning about one’s own culture and other cultures is an important part of becoming a tolerant member of society. They both also mentioned this ability as one of the goals in the curriculum.

Anders diverges from the others in the sense that he did not as explicitly state that deconstruction of stereotypes is a number one priority when teaching culture. However, when asked why it is important for the students to study culture he said:

I think it is important because we learn from each other. We learn traditions. We receive a deeper understanding of how you behave and perhaps even why and how I behave and how other people behave in different situations, but also what is important to them /.../ As a result, if one were to meet these people, they would have a deeper understanding of why they do this and how.

From a theoretical perspective, Anders expresses a product perspective of culture, emphasizing the merits of understanding behaviors and what causes them. One of his objectives, based on Larzén-Östermark’s model, seems to be to action-oriented, preparing the students for potential future intercultural meetings. However, he also mentioned an increased understanding of the behaviors in students’ own cultures as an objective. This could be interpreted as an indication that the objective is also for the students to gain a more bi-directional perspective on culture, with an outside perspective on their own cultural patterns and higher tolerance for other cultures.

In summary, all the teachers in some fashion expressed a bi-directional perspective among the students as an objective when teaching culture. However, their methods of doing so seem to largely be focused around transmission of facts. In her study, Larzen-Östermark (2008, pp. 540) notes a similar result with many interviewees who state that their main goal is to foster tolerance, but do not apply teaching strategies beyond transmission of facts. They “...tend to view ‘culture’ as a traditional paradigm with focus on national cultures associated with the target language area. The teaching of culture is -more or less explicitly- described as the transmission of facts” (ibid.). When talking about culture, the interviewees of the present study also seemed to primarily speak in terms of national culture. It could be argued however, that in their teaching strategies they go beyond the transmission of facts about nations. As mentioned, Louise encourages her students to adopt different roles to promote empathy. Emma also suggested role-play as a method of changing cultural perspectives she would like to try in the future. Jennifer tries to invite people from around

the world, such as foreign exchange students, to speak in her classes whenever possible. She also advocates class trips abroad and authentic cross-cultural communication, such as pen pal projects with students in other countries. These methods can all be classified as pedagogy of encounter. Furthermore, if one were to adapt the definition of the process perspective on culture, in which not only the internal process is considered but also how it is affected by external observation, some sort of input is necessary. Ambition among the teachers does not seem to be an obstacle to teaching strategies focused on encounters, but perhaps time and resources can be limiting factors. In these cases where cultural encounters cannot occur first hand, perhaps a more fact-oriented approach can give the students enough cultural input to challenge preconceptions and prejudice.

In addition to promoting empathy and open-mindedness, culture can function as a motivator for the students when teaching language. According to Louise, if a student is not particularly interested in the language itself and finds the English subject boring, they can read or listen to content about different cultural phenomena, which can spark an interest. This view is shared by Jennifer who stated that students generally find culture and realia interesting and motivating. Their observation was shared by one of the interviewed teachers in Larzén-Östermark's study (2008, pp. 541). It is notable that both Jennifer and Louise said that what students often find most interesting is dramatic facts about other cultures or spectacular differences between a target culture and their own. As examples, topics such as the death penalty, school shootings and crime statistics in the United States were mentioned. For Anders, large differences can make it easier for the students to compare different cultures, with the downside that the result may be superficial. Here a possible conflict between the motivational function of culture and the goal of a nuanced, bi-directional perspective can be distinguished:

...maybe the dramatic, horrible statistics, shooting of small children, metal detectors in schools. Stuff that is so far from our own surroundings /.../ I think you can use that to pique interest. It can be like, the exotic, that it would work to read about aboriginals in Australia or the natives of America or the Maori because they are so different. But then there is a risk that it becomes stereotypical, that we focus on what is different, perhaps because there is no other connection to New Zealand.

In this quote, Louise is talking about students in vocational programs, who may be less motivated generally but who may be fascinated by this kind of dramatic content. However, the appeal of dramatic contrasts is present in the university-preparatory programs that Jennifer teaches as well. When working with other cultures in her classes, the students themselves choose what they want to study and commonly they choose "exciting and exotic countries" or countries they imagine will

differ significantly from Sweden. However, these differences often prove to be less profound than the students expect and when comparing with Sweden it often turns out that their preconceptions about Sweden are challenged as well. Emma, who also works with stereotypes, stated that open discussion with the aim of puncturing stereotypes is important to avoid any stigmatization. It would appear that the risk of promoting stereotypical ideas of other cultures may be significantly decreased as long as there is enough time to study a culture beyond the initial lure of otherness, but that may also be considerably more challenging for the students.

4.3 Language Goals

When asked about what language goals they had for their students, none of the teachers expressed any preferred regional variety of English. Instead, the students are encouraged to choose freely. Emma has the students listen to different dialects and discuss variations in the language, but she does not demand that they must speak “British English or American English”. Both Jennifer and Louise share similar views, which indicates that the idea of British or American English as more desirable is considered obsolete by the interviewed teachers. This view arguably corresponds with the teachers’ expressed objectives for teaching culture -that is wider perspectives, nuance, empathy and tolerance. Anders stressed the importance of not limiting the teaching to one variety of English, but instead highlighting the diversity of the language. His primary language goal for the students is coherence. They should understand what they read and listen to, but according to Anders, they will only reach this goal if they use a language that is used all over the world. He admitted to previously having been limited to focusing on England when teaching and he believes that to be an easy mistake to make. So, like the other three, Anders advocates a richer variety of accents and dialects when teaching English. However, rather than a means of teaching cultural tolerance to his students he primarily views it as a necessity for intercultural communication and coherence. Debatably, this points to Anders being more oriented towards promoting skills that prepare his students for intercultural encounters than a bi-directional perspective. However, it is not certain that the former would necessarily exclude the latter.

Anders’ goal of providing his students with a language that they can use all around the world may indicate that the objective is to teach English as lingua franca rather than to achieve native speaker proficiency. Similar tendencies can be found among the other teachers as well. Jennifer expressed that one of her main goals is for the students to confidently use English “for the real world” with

less emphasis on how they use it. Louise wants to encourage her English 5 students to talk and not feel bound to any particular variety of English, stating that they do not have to speak American or British English but can: "...choose an Indian accent or an Australian accent, that is totally okay /.../ English is everywhere, everything is good. To listen to different accents and dare to imitate one." From these thoughts expressed by the teachers, the conclusion can be drawn that native speaker proficiency is not the main objective and that focus is more tilted towards English as lingua franca, a change that Gagnestam (2003, pp. 236) advocates in her study. Something that may also be a sign of this is that none of the teachers claimed to spend much time on teaching grammar or idioms that would help the students sound more like native speakers. In fact, grammar appears to be somewhat less prioritized in favor of function as showed by this quote from Louise:

Grammatically I do not go through a lot, I love it myself but /.../ English nowadays is supposed to be taught in functional contexts and that is not what a grammar exercise is /.../ So you could get good at grammar, but that is not really what we are doing. Rather, it should be writing a letter, applying for a job, it should be something with an expressed purpose.

English for authentic situations and communication appears to be the main goal rather than perfect grammar.

Yet, this does not mean that the teachers only require that their students' English is comprehensible. Even though what regional variety of the language they choose does not matter, other factors are important according to the interviewees. One such factor that Emma expressed is that it is important to remain consistent when it comes to accent, not mixing different accents, especially in the later courses, English 6 and 7. In this matter she also expressed that some inconsistencies are common, especially when speaking. Overall the teachers' answers indicate that even if they do not rank any English-speaking country higher than the others, as far as language is concerned, it is still very much a question of different national varieties. Rather than the standardized lingua franca that is advocated by Modiano (1999 cited in Gagnestam, 2003, pp. 67), the students are free to choose any of a wide variety of national dialects and accents. Arguably, rather than facilitating communication with all English speakers, regardless of origin, this could create more difficulties than if say, British English were the standard.

This diversity in language seem to mainly apply to spoken English in the interviewees' teaching, a conclusion that corresponds with what previous research suggests (Trudgill and Hanna, 1994

cited in Gagnestam, 2003, pp 67-68). When the students are writing, the criteria for success in the eyes of the teachers appear stricter. Emma hinted at this when she said that students tend to mix different dialects more when speaking. Louise stated that one of the most important things she wanted her students to learn is the awareness that you should not write the same way as you speak. Later she repeated the importance of the students being aware of different registers and in what contexts to use them. Students need to be aware of what is slang and what is not and to learn a more formal language since they are not “studying at a university-preparatory program to learn how to speak with their Australian or American friends, which is something they already know how to do after ninth grade”. Jennifer also expressed the objective of teaching the students to use an academic language saying that she does not think that slang is something that belongs in a school environment, since it is not something they will have any use for in higher studies or a workplace. Using Larzén-Östermark’s model, the objective here is action-oriented. The teachers want to provide the students with skills necessary to interact successfully with other cultures. In contrast to previous examples though, it is not a question of other nationalities but rather contexts that require formal or academic language to avoid cultural blunders, such as a job interview.

4.4 Comparing cultural features, “Swedishness” and “otherness”

For this subchapter, the teachers were asked to reflect on their didactic decisions when planning opportunities for the students to: “discuss some features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used, and make comparisons with their own experiences and knowledge” (The Swedish Board of Education, 2011, pp. 56), which is a requirement in all three English courses.

When asked which parts of the world where English is used they usually focused on, the teachers all seemed to believe it could be anywhere in the world, not just countries where English is a national language. This was motivated by the idea that English is used everywhere in the world as a means of intercultural communication and therefore any country would fit the description in the curriculum. The most common interpretation of the first part of the criterion was to let the students do research on a country and a specific feature, topic or event in that country. Emma, Jennifer and Louise all usually give their students freedom to choose for themselves which country and topic they want to research. Emma mentioned a project in which she wanted the students to choose five different news articles from different continents to study, while Jennifer instead wanted the students to focus on a specific topic. Both were of the impression that the students’ choices varied

considerably. Jennifer saw a pattern where the United States and other western countries were picked regularly and that “exotic” countries such as Thailand, India, China and North Korea also were popular. It could be argued that English is not used frequently in a country like North Korea, which indicates that the teachers see English as a form of official global language. Jennifer believed that these four “exotic” countries were often chosen due to frequent media coverage. Likewise, current events and news coverage seemed to be a factor for Anders and Louise when choosing what part of the world to study. Louise mentioned that she had finished a project related to the American election in which the students researched the United States. In this project, the election was used as an entryway into learning more about the whole country, studying topics ranging from Native Americans to the Civil Rights Movement. She also used Northern Ireland as an example of a country she frequently worked with in the past when there was a large amount of news coverage from there. In the interviews, Anders was the one who spoke the least in terms of having a nation as the target culture. When discussing what kinds of current events he uses, he mentioned the Grand National horse race, which is held once in a year, as an example. The focus appears to be not on England, where it is held, but rather on the race itself, what effect it has had on England and globally and how it has come to be associated with drug abuse, alcohol and violence. Another method he uses is to let the students compare music they listen to with music from for instance the 1960’s and ask questions about how music and society affect each other.

When asked how they interpret the second part of the criterion, generally the teachers use Sweden as a reference point for comparison. However, all the teachers expressed that this was not a necessity. Exceptions are generally made for students who have recently moved to Sweden from other parts of the world. When comparing, these students use their own experience, commonly their country of origin, as a reference point. In relation to Tholin’s (2012) study, this shows that although Sweden still appears to be the normative reference point, adaptations are made for students who have been raised elsewhere, so as to make assessment and grading more equal. A drawback to these adaptations expressed by Emma is that the teacher often does not have as much knowledge of other countries as they have of Sweden, which makes it more difficult to validate what the students write. Instead, focus is put on the language the student uses and how the comparison is made rather than pure fact-checking. Jennifer shares this view that Sweden is normally used to compare with “for the sake of simplicity”. As in previous subchapters, the teachers’ focus lies very much on nations when choosing what parts of the world to discuss and

how to interpret what counts as the students' own experiences and knowledge. National culture seems to be used partly out of habit and partly because it makes it more manageable for the teacher to supervise and assess the students' work. The question can be raised of whether this may influence the goal of intercultural empathy negatively. Gagnestam (2003, pp. 222) appears to be of this opinion as she states that attitudes that too vigorously emphasize and try to maintain differences between different national cultures may be a seedbed for racism. However, none of the teachers expressed any such tendencies. On the contrary, the expressed purpose is to learn about both Sweden and other countries to break stereotypes, see beyond differences and see similarities.

4.5 Challenges and Potential Improvements

When the teachers were asked about what the major challenges of teaching culture in EFL were, they mentioned time and resources, insufficient knowledge on the teacher's part and prejudice and disinterest on the students' part. According to Louise it can be difficult as a teacher to find the necessary time to develop one's own knowledge, including knowledge about culture. She expressed the possibility that lack of knowledge on the teachers' part may cause the previously discussed issue of mainly focusing on the exotic and spectacular differences of other cultures. In her experience, teachers used to have time to further their education by attending conferences and going on work trips abroad, but now there is no time for this and the teachers must use their spare time if they want to broaden their knowledge. Jennifer shares the view that shortage of time, particularly lesson time, is one of the major challenges and that sometimes the teacher's own knowledge may be lacking. Emma was the teacher who most emphasized the importance of dismantling stereotypes when teaching culture, and according to her prejudice among the students and fear of "otherness" is the greatest challenge. Finally, Anders finds it challenging to make culture motivating for the students: "Today we have students who do not read. They do not read books /.../ They do not watch the news. So that is it. Making it interesting enough."

It is no exaggeration to say that the teaching of culture is faced with many challenges. Nevertheless, the teachers all had ideas and methods for how to tackle them. Louise suggested that teachers should be given time to increase their own knowledge and visit other countries. Jennifer also suggested trips abroad, as she considered it a more rewarding experience for the students to visit other cultures rather than sitting in a classroom, reading about them. These suggestions are examples of pedagogy of encounter rather than information and may consequently more

effectively increase empathy among the students and teachers respectively. Anders suggested that it is easier to make other cultures interesting to the students if the teacher can base it on his or her own experiences. Thus, teacher trips may provide authentic experiences and anecdotes that may increase student motivation. Student trips may also be effective in making learning about culture more motivating and challenging student prejudice about other cultures. However, a pedagogy of encounter does not have to require expensive trips abroad. Emma suggested working with fiction as a way of learning about other cultures and mentioned the novel *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* which she uses. According to Lundahl (2012, pp. 404), fiction enables encounters with people, understanding of historical, economic and social conditions in other parts of the world and changing of perspectives. Another possibility voiced by both Emma and Jennifer is to utilize the diversity of a class, giving students with different backgrounds the opportunity to compare cultures with their own experiences and then sharing in class, allowing everyone to receive a wider variety of perspectives, within a relatively limited amount of time.

Based on what the interviews show about the teachers' conceptions of culture and how they teach it, a couple of observations can be made. First, the students' own interests and experiences are given room to affect the teaching. When studying other cultures the students generally are free to choose what parts of the world and what topics they want to learn about, as no culture is considered more important to learn about than others. This kind of student influence is advocated by Gagnestam (2003, pp. 235) and it is also stated in the curriculum that the students should "be able to exercise influence over their education" (The Swedish Board of Education, 2011, pp. 12). The problem with ethnic bias discussed by Tholin (2012) appears to be less of an issue with the interviewed teachers since students of non-Swedish origin use their own experience rather than "Swedishness" as a reference point. These students' experiences are considered assets since they give the rest of the class the possibility to encounter other perspectives. For the rest of the students though, Sweden is still the norm when comparing other cultures.

Overall, although the teachers do apply an affective orientation when teaching culture through a variety of methods based on encounter, pedagogy of information, specifically about national cultures still is prevalent. Gagnestam (2003, pp. 235) suggests that culture in language teaching should focus on problematization and discussion of attitudes and values rather than pure facts. In the light of this, focusing on national cultures may pose a problem since it favors a pedagogy of

information. Discussing values and attitudes of an entire nation is problematic since over-generalizations are bound to happen. Therefore, it would seem natural that facts and information that can be proven or measured is likely to receive more attention. A possible improvement could therefore be to adapt the teaching and spend less time studying facts about other countries. Instead the students can compare values and attitudes of individuals, their own experiences and ideas, and problematize the notion of national culture as something homogenous. A possible reason that the teachers focus on information can be that it is more familiar and requires less time to plan and realize, and this could be motivated by the expressed lack of time for the teachers to increase their own knowledge. Another reason mentioned by Larzén-Östermark (2010, pp. 542) is that a pedagogy of information generally is less likely to cause the teacher to be confronted with negative, defensive responses from students who have had their views and opinions challenged. This however, was not something that was expressed by the interviewed teachers. On the contrary, a common view was that students who have their preconceptions challenged, usually respond with positive surprise rather than aggressiveness.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has attempted to answer the questions of what conceptions the four interviewed English teachers have of culture in EFL, how they translate this into practice and in what ways the teaching of culture may be improved.

The immediate associations the teachers made with the word culture were both product-oriented, e.g. national traditions or sports, and process oriented, in the form of culture as intercultural competence. The expressed goal of teaching culture was often to promote a process perspective on culture by making the students challenge stereotypes, nuancing images of other cultures and promoting a bi-directional perspective on culture. Culture was also seen as a possible means of motivating students by highlighting spectacular differences between cultures, which could potentially be detrimental to the bi-directional ambition. The teachers' methods tended to be focused on product aspects of culture, focusing on facts and information, often about national cultures. This is something that may be improved if the goal indeed is a more process oriented perspective on culture. The teachers did have several ideas and methods that were more focused on transcultural encounters than facts. An issue however, seemed to be time to plan and realize these ideas and lack of resources for ideas such as class trips or staff trips.

In addition to promoting empathy and tolerance, an expressed goal was to prepare the students for intercultural encounters and communication. This was especially prominent when the teachers were asked about the language goals they had for the students. Heavy emphasis appeared to be put on diversity in language, as the teachers highlighted the many national varieties of English, giving no preference to any specific dialect, but rather attempting to give the students the tools to communicate with English speakers from all over the world. One intercultural communication goal that was repeatedly mentioned in association with the more advanced courses was to be able to communicate formally, both orally and in writing. This was considered something the students needed to know for both higher academic studies and for authentic situations such as job interviews conducted in English.

Finally, the teachers were asked about how they interpreted the formulation that the students should compare cultural features in parts of the world where English is used with their own experiences. The most common interpretation was to study some cultural phenomenon in another country and in Sweden and then compare the two. However, students who recently arrived in Sweden were encouraged to instead compare with their country of origin. This shows an improvement compared to earlier studies where students who had lived a shorter time in Sweden were at a disadvantage, since “Swedishness” exclusively was the norm for comparison. However, the focus on national culture may make it more difficult to promote a process rather than product perspective on culture, since it can be problematic to study abstract concepts such as values and attitudes of an entire, heterogeneous nation. There is a risk that the students do not reach beyond the mere comparison of facts and statistics. That being said, this is something the teachers seemed aware of and attempted to mitigate by spending much time discussing stereotypes and problematizing any over-generalizations.

The chosen topic of research raises several questions that may be the focus of future studies. Interviews with a larger number of teachers and students are necessary for valid conclusions about how culture is being taught in EFL in general. Furthermore, a problem for future studies could be to develop more teaching methods that promote a process perspective on culture while also being cost and time efficient. In an increasingly globalized world, intercultural competence and how to teach it is something all teachers should reflect on.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Bakgrundsinformation: När tog du lärarexamen? Hur många år har du arbetat som lärare?

Vad tänker du på när du hör ordet kultur?

Ser du något samband mellan språk och kultur?

Vad tycker du det är viktigt att eleverna lär sig i engelskundervisningen:

Om kultur, innehållsmässigt?

Språkligt?

Varför är just detta viktigt och finns det något samband mellan vad du vill att eleverna ska lära sig angående språk och kultur/innehåll?

Hur arbetar du med kultur i engelskundervisningen för att eleverna ska lära sig detta?

Hur påverkar kursen undervisningen om kultur?

Hur påverkar vilket program det rör sig om undervisningen om kultur?

Utifrån läroplanens formuleringar vilka sammanhang och delar av världen där engelska används fokuserar du på?

Hur ges eleverna förutsättningar att ”jämföra med egna erfarenheter och kunskaper” när de diskuterar företeelser i dessa engelskspråkiga sammanhang och delar av världen?

Vilka utmaningar ser du när det gäller att undervisa om kultur i engelska?

Vilka potentiella förbättringar gällande kultur i engelska ser du i:

Din egen undervisning?

Skolans styrdokument?

In English:

Background info: When did you receive your teaching degree? How many years have you been working as a teacher?

What do you think of when you hear the word culture?

Do you see a connection between language and culture?

What do you believe is important for your students to learn in EFL:

 About culture, content wise?

 Concerning language?

Why is this important and are there any connections between what you want the students to learn concerning both language and culture?

How do you work with culture in your EFL classrooms to help the students attain these goals?

 How do differences in course affect learning goals, content and method?

 How are learning goals, content and method affected depending on if the class is vocational or university-preparatory?

Based on the wording in the curriculum, which “contexts and parts of the world where English is used do you focus on?”

How do you deal with students’ different backgrounds when comparing these English-speaking contexts and regions with students’ own experiences?

What challenges do you face when teaching culture in the English classroom?

What possible improvements can you see concerning teaching culture in the English classroom in:

 Your own practice?

 The curriculum?

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