

Fiction Used in English Language Education in Sweden

A Multiculturalist Inquiry



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Abstract

This study is an attempt at mapping out what works of fiction teachers of English in Sweden tend to select in their teaching, as well as how they reflect on working with fiction from a multicultural point of view. These results were compared to the selections and reflections of Swedish teachers in order to discern what differences there are in how fiction is taught in first and second language education respectively. For finding these things out, a survey was conducted in the form of an online questionnaire to which 167 responses were received. The indicated works and answers were compiled and compared, and it was found that, although most teachers value selecting fiction using multicultural criteria, many teachers seem to overestimate their multicultural awareness since they often select fiction which is not in correspondence with the criteria that the teachers indicated that they value.

Keywords: second language education, literature, fiction, multiculturalism, canon, literary criticism, Swedish, English

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Introduction

Fiction plays a vital role in English and Swedish classrooms alike in the upper secondary school in Sweden. The syllabi clearly state that learners should read both contemporary and classic literature in the genres of fiction, poetry, and drama. Moreover, it enjoins that students should learn about various cultural and societal phenomena in countries in which these languages are used (Skolverket, 2012a, 2012b), areas which may very well be explored through fictional texts.

What is not mentioned in the Swedish syllabi for neither English nor Swedish, however, is what fiction to teach — nor is it specified how it should be taught. This gives teachers the freedom to select works and methods as they see fit, but it may also create situations in which teachers do not feel adequately equipped to select materials, potentially making them go by their own personal feelings, what their teachers taught them, or what is easily available. Of course, choosing materials which fascinate teachers need not be negative in any way; on the contrary, a teacher who instructs using a material which interests them is likely to be more engaging, thus enabling learners to be more engrossed in the subject at hand. Using materials which the teacher has been taught probably means that they know the works well, and what is available might also very well be what works best. But if a teacher selects materials entirely without analytical thought, there is a risk of uncritical selection from a narrow literary canon, rather than selecting fiction which may facilitate critical thinking and multicultural awareness in learners.

This study aims to answer some questions related to this potential issue. With what works of fiction teachers of English in Sweden tend to work will be examined, as well as how these teachers reflect on their choices of fiction and their priorities when working with it. Moreover, these results will be compared to teachers of Swedish to see what differences there are concerning what types of fiction are used in the subjects with regard to what authors and

central themes are prevalent. Since English holds a very strong position in Sweden (Norrby, 2015, p. 1), it should stand to reason that the selection of fiction for the subject of English at upper secondary school levels should be held to similar standards as the fiction used in Swedish teaching.

Aim of the Study

There were three main questions which were examined in this study:

- 1) What works of fiction are commonly used by teachers of English at secondary and upper secondary schools in Sweden?
- 2) How do these teachers reflect on the use of fiction in schools, mainly with regard to multiculturalism?
- 3) What can the differences between what fiction English and Swedish teachers select, and their reflections regarding multicultural fiction tell us about the subject of English in Sweden?

The working assumption was that there would be a greater focus on works that may be regarded to be part of the Western canon in the Swedish subject, since the Swedish subject syllabus seems to have a stronger emphasis on such works: “Teaching in the subject of Swedish should give students the opportunities to develop the following: [...] knowledge of key Swedish and international literary works and authors, and the ability to put these into a context” (Skolverket, 2012a, p. 2). While the syllabi for English state that learners should read “contemporary and older literature” (Skolverket, 2012b, “Reception”, para. 3), there is also an emphasis on learning about “different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket 2012b, “Content of communication”, para. 2). This would imply that works of fiction used in the English subject classroom can be more free to explore other themes, and also perhaps to be more contemporary and more directly aimed at the age group. Furthermore, English is a language that is used in many more countries than Swedish, and the syllabus for

English clearly states that literature from various countries where English is used should be included (Skolverket, 2012a, “Aim of the Subject”, para. 2).

Background

The syllabi for Swedish and English (Skolverket, 2012a, 2012b) do not make a clear delimitation of the terms ‘literature’ versus ‘fiction’. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the concept of ‘fiction’ as “the general term for invented stories, now usually applied to novels, short stories, novellas, romances, fables, and other narrative works in prose, even though most plays and narrative poems are also fictional” (Baldick, 2015, “fiction”). When the term is used in this essay, it is expanded to include plays and narrative poems as well. This is because the research project is concerned with authors of, and themes in, stories rather than text genres per se. The term ‘literature’ seems to be slightly more diffuse, encompassing a vast amount of text types (Baldick, 2015, “literature”), and can be said to be an umbrella term which also covers fiction.

Khatib and Nourzadeh (2011) provide some guidelines for picking literature for English as a second language (ESL) learners. One of the recommendations which they make is that literature used in ESL education settings should be selected based on a work’s opportunity for imparting language learning (e.g. by having a suitable linguistic and thematic level), and not on the perceived value of the literature in itself. Thus, they claim that it would be more important that the learners find the works interesting and that the texts fit the level on which the learners are, rather than what level of perceived literary merit the works hold. According to Skolverket (2016), learners tend to be “impacted by personal experiences and cultural frames of reference”, while teachers tend to focus on linguistic proficiency and knowledge of the history of literature (“Faktiva och fiktiva lässtrategier,” para. 2, my translation). Therefore, it might be beneficial to provide the learners with texts depicting a diversity of settings, characters, and themes, in order to stimulate the learners’ need for

relating to the literary works. Skolverket (2016) also states that learners benefit from being able to have a part in the literature selection process, since it contributes to their commitment and general reading experience, but that their reading repertoire needs to be expanded as well. Therefore, Skolverket (2016) advocates “freedom under guidance” (“Analyser kan förstöra läsoplevelsen”, para. 1, my translation). They also point out the importance of linguistic and narrative scaffolding — giving learners the knowledge needed for them to take in texts on their own — to help learners reach a deeper understanding of the texts.

Khatib and Nourzadeh (2011) also state that literature illustrating and discussing multicultural themes may be of use for second language acquisition, but that differences which are too great might impair the language learning if the learners have not been adequately prepared in advance and if the works are not discussed properly (pp. 259-261), which is something that Suntharesan (2013) also highlights. Moreover, Magnus Persson (2012) points out that to discard startling and provoking texts is to discard one of the major reasons for reading fiction (p. 84). From this perspective, it seems reasonable that one should not completely avoid difficult themes in second language education (at least not at higher proficiency levels), but that care should be taken that the literature is on an appropriate linguistic level so that the text is accessible to the learners (DeLuca, 2004, p. 175; Khatib & Nourzadeh, 2011, p. 260).

The term ‘multicultural literature’ is defined by Vandrick as:

[...] works by writers of various cultures, and/or readings about various cultures, including diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, religions, social classes, sexual orientations, and abilities or disabilities with representation of females as well as males; this literature should shed light on the lives of members of these diverse groups. (Vandrick, 1996, p. 254)

Worth mentioning is that this definition reinforces the dichotomous ideology of the binary system male/female, and that it does not include genders beyond this dichotomy (See for example Butler, 2006, pp. 50, 65). In this project, the concept signifies Vandrick's (1996) definition with the expansion that it also includes gender identities outside the borders of 'man' and 'woman'.

By reading fiction from non-standard varieties of English, learners can gain understanding and acceptance towards these varieties and cultures (Nelson, 1992, p. 275; Suntharesan, 2013; Vandrick, 1996, p. 256). It is stated in the Swedish syllabus that reading for a developed understanding of culture in its various forms should be a part of English education in Swedish upper secondary schools (Skolverket, 2012a). By being exposed to other languages and cultures through a language which they know, learners can gain understanding and acceptance – if done from a critical perspective, discussing similarities and differences, and taking care not to reinforce othering by simply showing differences without adequately dealing with them (Nelson, 1992, p. 275; Suntharesan, 2013; Vandrick, 1996, p. 267).

Zamyatina, Volodina, and Paraeva (2015) have studied the benefits of teaching Russian literature in a university course for learners of Russian as a second language, and found that by giving the learners a cultural foundation of Russian literature as well as proficiency in the language, the advantage that native speakers have in the form of previous knowledge cultural is reduced, thus minimizing gaps between learners from minority groups and those born in the dominant culture (2015, p. 160). Vandrick (1996) challenges this view: she argues that having learners of English as a second language in the U.S. study traditional literature of a Western canon can be beneficial, but that it would also be of importance to teach literature from the many and diverse minority cultures in the country for learners of English as a first language and second language learners alike: "Traditional Western

literature is important, but it is incomplete without inclusion of the literatures of many groups and cultures” (1996, p. 255). There is also a risk that the dominant Western culture is enforced on the learners if only Western literature is taught in a language class, especially if other cultures only are described through a Western point of view (Khatib & Nourzadeh, 2011, p. 262; Vandrick, 1996, p. 257). Consequently, literature should be used as an instrument towards multicultural understanding in addition to a means of teaching the canon of the dominant cultures of a language.

This is not to say that students cannot learn about culture from works which traditionally have been part of education. For example, Molloy (2011) has studied how teachers can work with a traditional Western author such as Selma Lagerlöf in multicultural classrooms, wherein the students’ questions and thoughts are the main parts of the lessons’ content. By making use of the learners’ own unique experiences and perspectives, Lagerlöf’s authorship is made relevant to everyone in the classroom. Similarly, Burger and Kruger (2003) have put forward how one could work with Chaucer from a queer point of view, deconstructing the characters and looking at them as *persons* rather than men and women, and examining their sexualities from non-normative perspectives. These examples show that it is entirely possible to teach traditionally canonical fiction from a multicultural point of view. This essay is, however, chiefly concerned with the overt representation of multiculturalism.

As much as it has been discussed over the last decades, it is not easy to find a definite definition of what the concept of ‘the Western canon’ entails, although it is a much-used term. Baldick (2015) defines the concept of ‘canon’ as:

A body of writings recognized by authority. Those [...] works of a literary author which scholars regard as authentic. The canon of a national literature is a body of writings especially approved by critics or anthologists and deemed suitable for academic study. (Baldick, 2015, “fiction”)

Of course, authorities do not always agree on what works should be part of the canon. One definition can be found in the somewhat controversial book *The Western Canon* (Bloom, 1995), in which Harold Bloom has compiled a list of 26 authors which he considers canonical. This list contains the likes of Homer, Joyce, Chaucer, Austen, and Dickinson — and has Shakespeare at its center. A great deal can be said about the canon — and much has indeed been said (see for example Bloom, 1995; Guillory, 1993), but since the main concern of this project does not have to do with canonicity per se, I will leave the subject of the definition of the Western Canon by making clear that it herein will be referred to as the works by European and North American (mostly male) authors which traditionally have enjoyed the most perceived literary merit, and thus often are taught as ‘classics’. A classic is defined by Baldick (2015) as “a work of the highest class, or so exemplary as to be studied as a model in classrooms” (“classic”, para. 1).

The ideas of canonicity in language education have also been much debated. The main points of these discussions are: 1) the modern literary canon is largely based on traditional Western male authors, and 2) this canon needs to be expanded (Applebee, 1993, pp. 75, 93; Nelson, 1992, p. 271; Vandrick, 1996, p. 254). Vandrick (1996) brings up the common argument that by expanding the canon to include literature from various minority cultures, the Western ‘classics’ may become excluded. She counter-argues that those who are in favor of integrating multicultural literature in the canon suggest including these works, rather than supplanting the existing ones (p. 254). In order to be exposed to fiction in other varieties of English, one needs to intentionally concentrate on these varieties because they are not part of what is normally given to learners (Nelson, 1992, p. 271), which is a quite strong argument for expanding the canon to cover a larger cultural ground. A work which is not part of the current Western canon may be what changes a student’s view of literature forever (Vandrick, 1996).

In Sweden, there had not been as much debate regarding literary canon formation going on as in many other countries until the year 2006 (Persson, 2012, p. 87). The debate took off when a center-right politician proposed an obligatory reading list for learners, which contained authors such as Carl Michael Bellman, Selma Lagerlöf, Kerstin Ekman, and Vilhelm Moberg. This was proposed in order to provide a traditional education in which the Swedish language and fiction would occupy the most space in the classroom, mainly for the sake of children from immigrant and/or uneducated families (p. 88) — much like the ideas presented by Zamyatina et al. (2015), stating that fiction should be used to teach about the prevalent culture of the country. The proposal was met with mixed feelings: some praised it for sending a clear indication of the importance of a common language and literature while others criticized its ethnocentrism and for playing on the xenophobic tendencies of the time. The proposed canon lacked in representation, for instance of women, immigrant authors, and sexual minorities (Persson, 2012, p. 88). Persson (2012) questions the negativity towards a canon that these proposals are met with, even though he is hesitant to the idea of a canon as it looks today. Instead, he talks about a flexible and inclusive canon that has both a contemporary and historical relevance (pp. 99-101). Even though the Swedish syllabi have paved the way for expanding the conception of fiction to include a widened representation of authors and themes, traditional Western canon is still dominating what fiction is selected according to Magnus Persson (2012, p. 95). Indeed, a new proposal of an obligatory literary canon in Swedish education was made the same year as this essay is being written (Stiskalo, 2016). This canon would be meant to uphold Swedish values and frames of reference, but it is not evident what works this canon would contain (Haimi & Mahovic, 2016).

It seems that an expansion of the Western canon is, slowly but steadily, underway. An extensive study carried out in the early 1990s has showed that, although fiction written mainly by male authors of the Anglo-Saxon tradition was used in English education in the United

States, fiction written by women had gained some ground compared to historical trends (Applebee, 1993, p. 93). Vandrick (1996) has analyzed a series of then-contemporary textbooks which claimed to be multicultural, and found that while they portrayed various cultures and religious beliefs, the books were mostly by and about European men, and all of the analyzed works lacked works from groups such as non-heterosexuals and disabled (p. 260). Flores (2009) also indicates a shift in attitudes towards implementing gay-themed fiction in language education settings, which would add to the multicultural literary body of works used in schools which is currently being formed (p. 155).

There does not seem to be very much research on what fiction Swedish teachers work with — and even less is to be found about what fiction English teachers in Sweden use. Therefore, I have been forced to largely examine texts dealing with fiction used in first language education. A survey was conducted by SVT (Sweden's national public TV broadcaster) in which it was found that Swedish teachers mostly work with Western male authors such as Jan Guillou, John Steinbeck, John Boyne, and August Strindberg (Stiskalo, 2016). Molloy (2011) states that Swedish teachers often teach what in turn was taught to them, but does not provide any real sources for this claim (p. 139). In a study by Lena Sohl (2000) the gender distribution of authors taught at the history of literature courses was examined. It was found that three quarters of the works used across both of the courses examined were written by male authors (pp. 17-18). In a series of teacher interviews, Brodow and Rininsland (2005) have found that teachers tend to select fiction from the following criteria: "1. The teacher's didactic aim, 2. The teacher's knowledge of learners' maturity and ability to take in literary texts, 3. Learners' tips and suggestions" (p. 130, my translation). Among the books mentioned are both more or less contemporary works, such as the *Harry Potter* series (Rowling, 1997-2007) and *Not Without My Daughter* (Mahmoody & Hoffer, 1987), and older ones such as *The Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway, 1952) and *Thérèse*

Raquin (Zola, 1867). It is also pointed out that Guillou's *Ondskan* (1981) seems to be part of the Swedish canon in the sense that most Swedish teachers use it in their education (Brodow & Rininsland, 2005, p. 132).

In an English language context, the fiction that tended to be employed in language teaching in the U.S. during the late 20th century also seems to have been permeated by the dominant views of canonicity. Even literature textbooks from the late 1990s which aimed to be multicultural were chiefly concerned with works by men from a Western tradition (Vandrick, 1996, p. 261). Moreover, Applebee (1993) shows that the fiction chosen by teachers in the 1990s was predominated by the same type of fiction as that in the anthologies and textbooks of the time (p. 82). He has found that most secondary school teachers state that they select fiction based on literary merit in the first place, and then on personal knowledge of the work; the probable chance that the work will interest learners; the works' accessibility; and the syllabus of the department (p. 79).

Applebee (1993) has also examined whether literature teaching reflects the multicultural diversity of American literature. To answer this, a survey was conducted in "nationally representative samples of English programs in public schools, Catholic schools, independent schools, and award-winning schools" (p. 9). Department chairs, teachers, and school librarians participated in questionnaires, and the findings were then condensed and compiled into statistics. It was found that the literature typically used was dominated by white male authors from an Anglo-Saxon tradition. These works were typically chosen from literary anthologies. The three most dominant authors were William Shakespeare, John Steinbeck and Langston Hughes (p. 82). Many of the authors most commonly taught in 1988, when this study was carried out, were still present from the last similar study before that, in 1963 (p. 69). The fact that teachers prioritize what they perceive as the literary merit of a work makes

it probable that the traditional ideas of the Western canon was upheld in secondary school education in the U.S. in the 1990s.

More recently, Tunks, Giles, and Rogers (2015) have found that elementary school teachers in the U.S. claim to use criteria for selecting fiction which aim to “broaden children’s view of themselves”, and for “teaching ethical values, teaching children about feelings, and broadening children’s views of themselves” (p. 63) — goals which seem very much compatible with a widened multicultural canon. Flores (2009) has examined whether elementary school teachers in Los Angeles were disposed toward employing gay-themed fiction in order to give learners a more nuanced and multicultural worldview. It was found that, while many (~59%) of the participating teachers were positively inclined toward using such literature in order to “increase gay familial awareness and acceptance and tolerance of homosexuals, create identification for gay students, and help reduce homophobia” (p. 151), they often do not implement it due to fear of disapproval from parents and authorities.

It does not seem as though a study of the magnitude and rigor of Applebee’s (1993) has been carried out since the 1990s. However, the Open Syllabus Project (The Open Syllabus Project, n.d.-b) is continuously charting what literature is used in the syllabi of various higher educational fields — English being one of them. According to the website, over one million syllabi have been compiled for the project (The Open Syllabus Project, n.d.-a). Among the most frequent works of fiction according to this website, *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818), *Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1478), *Paradise Lost* (Milton, 1677), and *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1599-1602) are in the top five. Since this project is on a higher educational level, these findings may not be very relevant to the fiction secondary schools, but given that teachers seem to have a tendency to use fiction in their teaching which they themselves have studied (Molloy, 2011, p. 139), it may be that the works most commonly used in higher education also is part of the fiction used in secondary schools.

Method

Having the research questions and theoretical framework cited in the previous sections in mind, two questionnaires were constructed in order to find out what works of fiction teachers tend to use, and what they find important when selecting fiction. The two surveys were identical except for the languages: the questionnaire was constructed in English and then translated to Swedish. This was done in order to give teachers of English who were not as proficient in Swedish an equal opportunity to answer the survey while also catering to the teachers of Swedish, who most likely would prefer to answer a questionnaire in said language. Care was taken that the Swedish translation of the survey was as close to the English original as possible in order to obtain comparable results.

Caution was also exercised when constructing questions in order to avoid leading wordings, and to have a balance of open and closed questions (Nunan, 1992, p. 143). The latter was done so that a satisfying amount of easily quantifiable data could be obtained in addition to answers which would provide opportunities for deeper analysis (Nunan, 1992, p. 145). Fields for optional comments were also provided after each question, as well as a field for general comments at the end of the questionnaire. This was done so that participants would be able to voice an opinion which was not an option in the questionnaire, as well as further explain their choices if they would feel the need. The answer alternatives were constructed to suit all ranges of answers so that the participants would not feel backed into a corner, as it were, by not being provided with alternatives which corresponded to their feelings, and in cases where it was deemed applicable, an 'other' option was provided.

The survey underwent a piloting phase in which my fellow pre-service teachers and my research project supervisor filled out a prototype of the questionnaire and provided feedback on language and content. For instance, one of the pilots argued that it would be too leading to explain the term 'literary merit' as works which have received a great deal of praise

in the question “What three (3) criteria do you find the most important when selecting literature?”, so that explanation was deleted. Another pilot argued that it would be of interest to ask whether teachers have some common list of fictional works which they share amongst each other. This aspect was not added as a query of its own due to the need to keep the questionnaire short enough for teachers to be willing to answer it. Instead, it was incorporated in the question of from where teachers find inspiration when selecting fictitious works. The answer ‘colleagues’ was already in the form, but the options ‘school library’ and ‘school administration’ were added. By including these options in the survey, it was hoped that it would become evident if teachers tend to share works among each other. The same pilot also suggested to include the question of whether teachers keep the works of fiction which they use in their teaching year after year, or if they revise their literature lists every year: this was added as a separate question.

The questionnaires were then submitted to appropriate sources. Some suitable teachers and one principal of an upper secondary school were asked to answer the questionnaire and to spread it to their colleagues. The questionnaires were also shared in suitable groups on the social media site Facebook. These groups were exclusively meant for teachers, usually of the subjects which the surveys were aimed at, but sometimes these groups were aimed at teachers in general.

The survey was open for six days. When it was closed and the results examined, an issue with several identical answers was found. In the Swedish survey, three cases of uniform answers were identified. One of the cases had four identical answers; the other two were pairs of answers which were exactly alike. In the English survey, three pairs of such answers were found. Since these answers were identical throughout all of the questions, including the comments, it was deemed likely that the identical answers were caused by technical faults, since it would be extremely unlikely that different participants entered the exact same data,

especially since all the occurrences were quite close together in time. Therefore, these answers were deleted from the survey.

Regarding the gender of the authors, it is potentially precarious to determine another person's gender, since it ultimately belongs to that person (see for example Butler, 2006). Seeing that I obviously could not ask each author personally what gender they subscribe to, I have had to try to ascertain their gender identities in other ways for the sake of this study. In some cases, the editions of the works used contained a section about the author, from where I simply have interpreted the pronouns used as indicators of genders (Conrad, 1899/2014; Fitzgerald, 1925/2014; Lee, 1960/1995; Orwell, 1945/2009; Steinbeck, 1937/2006). In the cases of Arkan Asaad, Johanna Thydell, Mark Haddon, Stephen Chbosky, Stig Dagerman, and Louis Sachar, the official web pages of the publishers or authors have been used to find information on the authors (Asaad, 2013; L. Dagerman, 2016; Doubleday, 2007; Sachar, n.d.; Simon & Schuster, 2016). In the case of John Boyne, whose biography on both his own web page and the publisher's site were written from a first-person perspective (Boyne, 2013; Boyne, 2016), and Boyne did not refer to himself as a man, as was the case with Louis Sachar (Sachar, n.d.), a third party site was used to get an indication of his gender (Famous Authors, 2012). None of the authors in the most frequently indicated works seem to openly subscribe to genders outside the man/woman dichotomy, at least not from the information derived from the sources employed.

For the other 245 works indicated in the surveys, I have simply used the authors' names to ascertain their genders. I appreciate that this approach is problematic due to the risk of misgendering individuals, and because gender is a spectrum rather than a dichotomy (Butler, 2006), but in this case there is not enough time for me to establish each author's gender identity, and I have thus had to rely on the gendered cultural coding in names to get a conception of the genders of the authors.

The biographical web pages were also used for discerning the authors' nationalities. In the events that the author's nationalities were not mentioned in these short texts, other texts were used. The page about Mark Haddon (Doubleday, 2007) did not provide information about Haddon's nationality, so an autobiographical text in "The Guardian" was used (Haddon, 2004), and for Johanna Thydell I also used a newspaper article (Kalmteg, 2006).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Probably the most obvious one is that of number of participants. With a total of 167 answers, more data than expected was gathered, but it is still likely not enough to get a true representation of the entire population of secondary and upper secondary teachers of English and Swedish in Sweden. In the school year of 2015/2016, there were 10,323 teachers of Swedish and 8,773 teachers of English who were active at the levels concerned, making a total of 19,096 teachers (Sveriges Officiella Statistik, 2016a, 2016b). This means that out of the entire population of possible participants, about 0.87% of those answered the questionnaire. However, these findings should cover a large sample spread of teachers, since the questionnaire was shared on several groups on Facebook which had different populations and aims. All in all, the findings generated from this preliminary study should be able to provide a general indication about teachers' choices of, and attitudes towards, fiction.

Another limitation that occurs when using questionnaires to gather information is that the participants do not necessarily answer according to what they actually practice, but rather what they think they practice. The section in which teachers gave examples of works of fiction which they use in their teaching should be fairly unproblematic since they were not asked to provide books from certain criteria. The part which examines teacher's stances to multicultural fiction, however, does not have to reflect the reality of what fiction teachers choose, but rather how they think they select it and how they think it should be selected. What

teachers think they do is in itself worth investigating, however, and the issue of to what degree it corresponds with reality is something that would be interesting to investigate.

Out of the mentioned total of 167 answers, 47 answers were submitted on the questionnaire for teachers of English. This leaves 120 answers on the questionnaire for teachers of Swedish for the contrastive analysis. This unevenness in representation of subject teachers makes the survey of Swedish teachers slightly more representative than English teachers, but since the number of participants is too low to make an entirely reliable generalization either way, the results should still be enough to make it possible to make some worthwhile comparisons.

Regarding the analysis of the works of fiction indicated by the participants, there is simply not scope enough for me to do a thorough breakdown of the works, and so there will not be opportunities to deeply examine all of the sections of multiculturalism which Vandrick (1996) describes. When inspecting central themes, I have not delved into these areas to the extent that I would have liked to in order to give a fully in-depth mapping of the motifs, but rather a brushing past of them.

Findings

The age of the participants ranged from 24-66 years, with a mean of 40.2 years, a median of 40, and a mode of 45. Out of the total of participants, 82.6% identified themselves as women; 15.6% as men; 1.2% preferred not to say; and 0.6% subscribed to genders other than the binary system of man/woman. The share of participants who were men was slightly higher in the group of English teachers: 19.1% vs. 13.3%. In the group of teachers of English, the number of teachers at upper secondary schools was overrepresented: 83%, which leaves 17% working at secondary schools. This was more even in the population of Swedish teachers: 53.3% worked at secondary schools, while 46.7% worked at upper secondary schools.

The most important criteria stated for selecting literature were similar between the two groups: suitable themes for discussion, a suitable linguistic level, and likeliness that the learners will find the texts interesting were the three prevailing criteria. However, a suitable linguistic level was the most important one for teachers of English (along with suitable themes), while it was on third place amongst teachers of Swedish. For Swedish teachers, the most important criteria stated was the likeliness that learners will find the works interesting, with a percentage of 84.2%. When finding inspiration for selecting fiction, Swedish teachers stated that they mostly go by personal taste (74.2%), colleagues (70.8%), and school-related publications (60%). English teachers said that they prefer colleagues over personal taste (74.5% vs. 66%), and stated research as the third most used option (59.6%). The use of research for selecting fiction was picked by a mere 14.2% of Swedish teachers. Across the questionnaires, none stated that they are influenced by their school administrations. Some stated social media and their own learners as sources of inspiration in addition to the given options.

Out of the teachers of Swedish, 95.8% stated that they keep some or most of the works of fiction which they use in their teaching over the years. 3.3% (i.e. four people) stated that they completely change what fiction they use, and one person — 0.8% — indicated that they never or seldom change what works they teach. The results for English teachers were similar, with the difference that a slightly smaller share of participants stated that they completely change materials: 1 person, or 2.1%. Many commented that it is hard to gain monetary funds to obtain new materials, and that they keep works which previously have worked well. This is something that the interviewed teachers in Brodow and Rininsland (2005, p. 130) state as well. Some also pointed out the necessity to adapt what fiction is used to the learners' interest and level of proficiency. Further, some indicated that they have not worked long enough to know, and that they would have liked to be able to give such an answer.

In tables 1 and 2, lists of the eight works which most frequently were indicated in both surveys have been compiled. The reason for having the list consist of eight works is because after the eighth most used work in the survey for English teachers, 17 works had the indication frequency of 2, making it impossible to make a list of ten works. From the data compiled by Applebee (1993), only one of the three most commonly used authors are present in the list from this survey: John Steinbeck, who interestingly only is present in the list from the Swedish teacher group. Neither William Shakespeare nor Langston Hughes are among the most taught authors in this survey. Shakespeare is mentioned a total of three times by English teachers — twice in connection with *Hamlet* and once with *Othello* — a percentage of 0.84%. In the Swedish survey, 1.40% of the works were written by Shakespeare. Langston Hughes is not mentioned at all. From the ten most used works in the field of English in the Open Syllabus Project (n.d.-b), only *Heart of Darkness* is present in the two top eight lists from this study. However, that project maps syllabi in higher education, and it also compiles nonfiction, which results in a slightly skewed comparison. The list of works used by teachers of Swedish is quite similar to the one compiled by SVT (Stiskalo, 2016). Out of the list of eight works compiled from this study, six are present on the list by SVT.

The distribution of genders in the eight works of fiction most often selected by teachers of Swedish is not very even: two of the authors (25%) are women — Jessica Schiefauer and Johanna Thydell. The genders of the authors chosen by teachers of English are even less balanced — only one of the top eight works were written by a woman: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960/1995). It is, however, the work most frequently mentioned by the teachers of English: the number of times Lee's work is stated makes up 23% of the total on the top eight list. This is comparable to the teachers of Swedish: *När hundarna kommer* by Jessica Schiefauer (2015), alongside *Doktor Glas* by Hjalmar Söderberg (1905/2012), is the most used work in this group; and *I taket lyser stjärnorna* by Johanna

Thydell (2003) is, along with Stig Dagerman's "Att döda ett barn" (1948/1983), the least used of the eight works. Together, they make up a total of 27.8%. Out of the total of works indicated, 39.6% of the works given by Swedish teachers are women (or, at least, have traditionally female names) — a much more even distribution than in the top eight list. However, a mere 26% of the works used by teachers of English were written by authors with female names.

The unevenness of the authors' genders seems a bit peculiar considering that both of the groups consists of a large majority of teachers who identify as women. This may have to do with the fact that teachers tend to teach what they were taught in their own education (Molloy, 2011, p. 139), taking into consideration the tradition of mainly including male authors in the canon and education (Bloom, 1995; Guillory, 1993; Persson, 2012, p. 95), and thus including the same works in the language education. Furthermore, we can see that the group which has a larger share of teachers who identify as men also provides a smaller share of works by female authors.

The correlation vis-à-vis the share of teachers who identify as men and the number of works by authors who are women is in concordance with the question regarding balancing the genders of authors, which was indicated to be less important to teachers of English than those teaching Swedish. While about 74% answer on the 'important' side of the spectrum on both questionnaires, 23.4% gave it the highest rating of importance on the English questionnaire, compared to 29.2% of Swedish teachers who did so. A few commented that, while they think that balancing the authors' genders (and bringing out female writers) important, they mainly prioritized works which may interest learners or which they consider 'good', but gave no indications of what they consider a good work of fiction in their comments.

In terms of nationality, there is a clear Eurocentric tendency in the sixteen most used works. Five of the authors of works used by English teachers were from the U.S. (Albom,

n.d.; Fitzgerald, 1925/2014; Lee, 1960/1995; Sachar, n.d.; Simon & Schuster, 2016), and one is English. The remaining two, George Orwell and Joseph Conrad, were born in India and Poland respectively, but they both moved to the U.K at a young age and spent a substantial amount of their lives there (Conrad, 1899/2014; Orwell, 1945/2009). The results for Swedish teachers were comparable: five of the authors in the top eight list were born in Sweden, one in the U.S., one in the U.K., and one — Arkan Asaad — was born in Iraq, but soon moved to Sweden, where he still lives and works (Asaad, 2013). Two of the works in the Swedish list were not originally written in Swedish — *Möss och Människor (Of Mice and Men)* by John Steinbeck (1937/2006), and *Pojken i randig pyjamas (The Boy in the Striped Pajamas)* by John Boyne (2006). Neither these works nor the authors are on the top eight list of works used by teachers of English, even though both of them were originally written in English. *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/2006) was indicated to be used by 2 teachers, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Boyne, 2006) is not mentioned at all by the teachers of English.

These Eurocentric tendencies are not in concordance with the teachers' beliefs about diversity in terms of nationality. About 80% of English and Swedish teachers alike felt that teaching works of fiction written by authors from various parts of the world is important; but the English teachers seemed to value this slightly higher than the Swedish teachers. 53.2% of said teachers gave this question 7 or 8 out of 8, while 42.5% of the Swedish teachers did the same. Some Swedish teachers indicated that they would have liked to work more with such fiction, but that they lacked funds and/or ability to find suitable translations. It is likely that the English teachers value diversity more due to the fact that English is a much more global language than Swedish, which enables teachers to use fiction from a wider range of nationalities, even though the numbers in this survey do not indicate that this is being done as much as teachers claim that they would want to or believe that they do.

This is not to say that all of the works lack themes which relate to nationality and culture. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960/1995) revolves around the motifs of ethnicity and racism, and *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1899/2014) has been called a post-colonial work. *Stjärnlösa nätter* (Asaad, 2013) deals with arranged marriages and culture clashes. This novel also seems to be the only one which overtly deals with religion as a central theme. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Boyne, 2006) deals with the Holocaust (which, of course, also has to do with religion, but this does not appear to be one of the main motifs of the work), and *När hundarna kommer* (Schiefauer, 2015) revolves around a hate crime in the form of a murder. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945/2009) contains allegorical references to both ethnicity and class in the way the farm animals are divided into hierarchies.

Across all of the works in the two lists, only one deals overtly with non-heterosexual themes: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, which depicts a young man who secretly is romantically involved with a male football player (Chbosky, 1999). This is particularly interesting, since the average percentage of teachers in both groups who stated that they believed in incorporating works which depicts various sexual orientations was 76.8% — a quite high number. Furthermore, 13 percentage units more of the Swedish teachers state that they think incorporating works which represent various sexual orientations is very or somewhat important: 83.3% versus 70.3%. Yet, it is only in the English teacher group that such a work is frequently used.

Some of the works deal with disability. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon, 2008) is about a boy with autism; *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Albom, 1997) depicts the fight with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS); and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/2006) revolves around a mentally disabled man. *I taket lyser stjärnorna* (Thydell, 2003) also deals with a young woman's mother who is dying of cancer. Whether this representation of disability is due to teachers valuing the incorporation of works with this kind of

representation or if these findings are a mere coincidence is something that this survey sadly is not equipped to answer.

These often quite homogeneous results are surprising, considering that almost all of the participating teachers implied that they find multicultural representation in the fiction they teach important: 91.5% of the English teachers gave it a score of 5-8, 2.1% gave it a 4, and the remaining 6.4% gave it a score of 1-3 out of 8. The Swedish teachers had similar numbers, with a score of 1-3 among 3.3%, a score of 4 by 7.5%, and a remaining 89.2% gave it a 5 or higher. To find these multicultural works was considered varyingly difficult. Among English teachers, 38.3% declared that they found it somewhat easy, and 34% regarded it to be somewhat hard. A greater share of English teachers found it very hard (8.5% vs. 4.2%) — as well as very easy (12.8% vs. 5.8%). Out of the Swedish teachers, 49.2% stated that they found it somewhat easy to do so, while 38.3% found it relatively hard.

Out of the group of English teachers' most used works of fiction, half were written in 1960 or earlier, the oldest being from 1899. Three of the remaining works were written in the late 1990s, and the newest in 2003. This indicates a somewhat even distribution between what might be regarded as 'classics' and contemporary fiction, although it is interesting that none of the books most frequently used by English teachers are from this decade. Again, this may be explained by the tendency of choosing fiction which teachers were taught in their own schooling which Molloy speaks of (2011, p. 139). Thus, a generational gap in which teachers have not been taught newer works of fiction and therefore feel uncomfortable doing so themselves may have been created. However, the participating teachers in the survey did not to a very large extent state that they use their own education as a significant source of inspiration for choosing fiction to work with: 21.3% of English teachers and 11.7% of Swedish teachers picked it as one of the three most common sources of inspiration. Whether this statement of Molloy's (2011), or the findings in the study are correct, I cannot say. As

mentioned in the “limitations” section, this survey examines what teachers think they believe and practice, rather than what they actually believe and practice. Therefore, it may well be that the teachers use their own schooling as inspiration for selecting fiction to a larger extent than they believe – their perception of what fiction is ‘good’ is liable to come from their education – but it might also be the case that Molloy’s (2011) claims do not apply to the population examined in this study. Another explaining factor may be that it can be difficult to apply for funding to procure newer materials, which is something that was stated in comments on several occasions. It does not, however, explain why half of the works indicated by Swedish teachers were written in the 21st century — two of which were written in the 2010s. A pure speculation is that the fiction used in the Swedish subject is deemed to be more important since it is the dominant language in Sweden and has an explicit literary core (Skolverket, 2012b).

Conclusion

Contrary to the working assumptions stated in the ‘aims’ section, there do not seem to be any substantial differences in English and Swedish teachers’ beliefs regarding fiction, nor what central themes they work with. Neither were the works used by English teachers more diverse than those selected by Swedish teachers — in terms of the balance of authors’ genders, the Swedish teacher group was the prevailing. Overall, it seems that the English teachers tend to select works according to multicultural criteria to a lesser extent than Swedish teachers, with the exception of depicting non-heterosexuality, in which case the only work which contained such themes was used by English teachers. This apparent negligence of multicultural fiction may be because second language teachers need to take the linguistic level into consideration to a larger extent than first language teachers (Khatib & Nourzadeh, 2011, pp. 259–261; Suntharesan, 2013). Another possible explanation is the heavier emphasis on fiction in the Swedish subject (Skolverket, 2012b). No matter what the explanation may be, it seems

English teachers need to expand their literary repertoire so that it covers a wider area of the English speaking cultures, since that is a central part of the subject of English at upper secondary school in Sweden (Skolverket, 2012a).

It appears that a study of this kind with a larger scope is needed, taking into consideration that it appears there are some significant discrepancies regarding what fiction language teachers are of the opinion that they teach and their beliefs regarding it, and their actual practice. This survey might be regarded as a preliminary study into a subject that needs further and deeper investigation.

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Tables

Table 1

The Eight Works of Fiction Most Commonly Used by Teachers of English

	<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Year of Publication</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
1.	Lee, Harper	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	1960	9	6.52
2.	Haddon, Mark	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i>	2003	7	5.07
3.	Chbosky, Stephen	<i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>	2012	7	5.07
4.	Orwell, George	<i>Animal Farm</i>	1945	4	2.90
5.	Sachar, Louis	<i>Holes</i>	1998	4	2.90
6.	Albom, Mitch	<i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i>	1997	3	2.17
7.	Conrad, Joseph	<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	1899	3	2.17
8.	Fitzgerald, F. Scott	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	1925	3	2.17

Table 2

The Eight Works of Fiction Most Commonly Used by Teachers of Swedish

	<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Year of Publication</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>% of total</u>
1.	Schiefauer, Jessica	<i>När hundarna kommer</i>	2015	15	4.21
2.	Söderberg, Hjalmar	<i>Doktor Glas</i>	1905	15	4.21
3.	Guillou, Jan	<i>Ondskan</i>	1981	12	3.37
4.	Steinbeck, John	<i>Möss och människor</i>	1937	12	3.37
5.	Boyne, John	<i>Pojken i randig pyjamas</i>	2006	9	2.53
6.	Asaad, Arkan	<i>Stjärnlösa nätter</i>	2012	8	2.25
7.	Dagerman, Stig	<i>Att döda ett barn</i>	1948	7	1.97
8.	Thydell, Johanna	<i>I taket lyser stjärnorna</i>	2003	7	1.97