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Behaviorism versus Intercultural Education in the Novel *Purple Hibiscus*

A Literature Study of Education in *Purple Hibiscus*
from a Swedish EFL Perspective

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to analyze two different educational paradigms, which I refer to broadly as the behavioristic way of learning through imitation versus intercultural education, as these are depicted in the novel *Purple Hibiscus* by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The analysis focuses on how the narrator Kambili's learning, identity and personal development are differently affected by these two contrastive approaches to education. After the analysis, examples of how the novel can be taught in intercultural, communicative EFL classrooms will be given. In the analysis theories of mimicry and imitation, and identity will be used as well as understandings of the terms intercultural education and behaviorism. The analysis shows that Kambili's father Eugene represents behaviorism in the novel, whereas Kambili's aunt Ifeoma symbolizes intercultural education. At home, Kambili learns to imitate her father's behavior and values. In Ifeoma's house on the other hand she encounters a kind of intercultural education, where critical thinking and questioning are encouraged.

The thematization of contrastive educational and developmental paradigms in the novel is relevant to the comprehensive goals of Swedish upper secondary schools, which promote intercultural learning, as well as critical thinking and reflection on learning processes. Reading literature in the EFL classroom at this level may promote these broad educational objectives as well as the achievement of more specific, language- and culture-based learning outcomes. For many Swedish EFL students, *Purple Hibiscus* may represent difference, and therefore it is a suitable novel to include in intercultural education, as the students are encouraged to understand and reflect on different perspectives. By discussing the novel in groups, the education becomes intercultural because everyone becomes active participants and everyone's voices are heard.

Keywords:EFL, literature, intercultural education, imitation, behaviorism, learning, identity, personal development, communicative competence

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Introduction

The distance between people and cultures is constantly shrinking in today's world due to globalization, internet and migration. Sweden today is a heterogeneous society, and in Swedish schools many different cultures meet and interact with each other daily (Lahdenperä 11). Therefore it becomes even more important that the teachers' competence of intercultural pedagogy is adequate. Intercultural pedagogy is an approach to teaching and cultural meetings that emphasizes interaction, equality and social justice (Lahdenperä 15). Teachers have to be able to meet different cultures with an open mind and take advantage of diversity instead of seeing it as a difficulty. The Swedish educational researcher Ulla Lundgren defines intercultural understanding as the ability to understand that everyone perceives the world differently and one's own perception is only one of many others (Lundgren 13).

One way to talk about multiculturalism (i.e. the heterogeneous society) and adopt an intercultural approach in language classrooms is to read literature from different cultures to create understanding and tolerance towards difference. According to Anna Greek, reading literature meets at least two goals in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL)-curriculum in Sweden. Firstly, authentic literary texts give the reader a feeling for the syntax and vocabulary of the target language. Secondly the learner gains insight into the cultures of English-speaking countries through literature (Greek 3-4). Bo Lundahl adds that reading literature as experience provides motivation to further reading (Lundahl 327).

This study will analyze the novel *Purple Hibiscus* by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie from an educational perspective and connect it to an intercultural approach to teaching in Swedish upper secondary EFL classrooms. In the analysis of the novel behaviorism and imitation as a teaching method will be compared to intercultural education. When behaviorism was prevalent in EFL teaching during the 70's in Sweden, imitation was an important teaching method. The students were supposed to parrot the teacher in order to learn proper pronunciation and vocabulary. Imitation as an educational tool can be oppressive, which can be seen in the novel. Instead the curriculum emphasizes an international perspective on education, which emphasizes solidarity and understanding towards different cultures outside and within Sweden ("Curriculum" 6). This is fundamental within an intercultural education, and even if the curriculum does not use the term intercultural in this context, the interpretation in this essay is that the curriculum promotes

intercultural education. In the final discussion of the essay, some practical aspects of how to work with *Purple Hibiscus* interculturally will be highlighted. Group work as an intercultural teaching method will be highlighted as well as reasons for bringing in just *Purple Hibiscus* to the intercultural classroom. According to Lundahl, working in groups is an effective method for communicative language learning, since everyone has to participate (Lundahl 134). When everyone participates the classroom also becomes democratic and intercultural as everyone's voice is heard (hooks 41). Finally, I will argue that *Purple Hibiscus* is a suitable novel in the intercultural classroom, because it represents difference in a Swedish context, and also, questions of the "other" can be explored when discussing this novel. This essay argues that reading literature in EFL classrooms is part of an intercultural education, as students encounter different cultures through literature and thus are encouraged to develop understanding and tolerance towards difference.

Aim of the Study and Research Questions

In this essay *Purple Hibiscus* will be analyzed from an educational perspective, focusing on two teaching philosophies that are connected to different methods: behaviorism, connected to ideas about imitation, and intercultural education, connected to the promotion of critical thinking and questioning, including questioning of authorities. This contrast exists on a thematic level in the novel, and thus facilitates examination and reflection about educational goals and methods important to EFL students and teachers. The aim is to explore how the novel depicts learning, identity and personal development, and to suggest how the novel can be taught in the intercultural EFL classroom. The teaching methods that are compared are the behavioristic way of learning through imitation versus intercultural education. The research questions are: How does the novel depict learning and pedagogy? How is learning by imitation depicted compared to learning by critical and independent thinking? How does identity relate to the two teaching methods? Finally, in a separate section, I will discuss how one can work with *Purple Hibiscus* in the Swedish upper secondary EFL classroom from an intercultural perspective. This essay argues that behaviorism and imitative education can be oppressive, as opposed to intercultural education which promotes liberal values of tolerance, mutual understanding, equality and social justice (Lahdenperä 15).

Purple Hibiscus in the EFL classroom

In an intercultural education it is important to create opportunities for the students to get insight and reflect on different people and cultures, and this can be done through literature (Lahdenperä 24). Reading literature is mentioned in the curriculum as “central content” (centralt innehåll) in both the compulsory EFL courses (English 5 and 6) for upper secondary school. In English 5 the students should study “content and form in different kinds of fiction” (“Innehåll och form i olika typer av fiktion”, my translation) and the curriculum also mentions specifically “imaginative literature and other fiction” (“skönlitteratur och annan fiktion”, my translation) (GY11 54-55). In English 6 the use of literature is a little more sophisticated as the students should study “themes, motifs, form, and content in film and literature; authorship and literary epochs” (“Temat, motiv, form och innehåll i film och skönlitteratur; författarskap och litterära epoker”, my translation) (GY11 60).

Hence, working with literature is a natural element in the Swedish EFL classroom. In my view, *Purple Hibiscus* is a suitable novel for EFL-learners in upper secondary school of several reasons. Firstly, the language level is appropriate. The narrator, Kambili, is a 15 year old girl and her vocabulary and grammar as well as her thoughts are on her level. Second, the novel is a bildungsroman, and in its relation of Kambili’s development it depicts family and relationship issues, matters that are universal and easy for readers to relate to. Even though some Swedish EFL students might feel unfamiliar with the Nigerian context and culture, the topics of relationship and family issues should be comprehensible and thus reading this novel also decreases the distance between Sweden and Nigeria, between “us” and “them”. Furthermore, Lahdenperä points out that reading literature should be used in the intercultural classroom to learn and create respect and understanding towards difference. Through literature the reader also *interacts* with other people and cultures, which is central in the intercultural perspective (Lahdenperä 24). Also, one of the goals in the EFL curriculum for upper secondary school is to develop the ability to “discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used (“Förmåga att diskutera och reflektera över livsvillkor, samhällsfrågor och kulturella företeelser i olika sammanhang och delar av världen där engelska används”, my translation) (GY11 54). Hence, it is a criterion to include perspectives from different parts of the English-speaking world, and literature from Nigeria, where English is one official language and where literary production has been very high, could be used for this reason.

Finally, based on a quick search on Google, it is evident that many universities throughout the world teach *Purple Hibiscus*. It is harder to find information on what upper

secondary schools include in their English classes, but the fact that *Purple Hibiscus* is taught in universities still prove that it is a novel with depth, suitable for classroom discussions and teaching.

However, hooks maintains that it can also be problematic to include texts from “other” cultures. If the teacher ignores the writer’s ethnicity or does not discuss issues of race, gender and ethnicity in relation to a black woman writer, reading the text can lead to more prejudice instead of reducing it (hooks 38). On the other hand, categories of race, ethnicity, class and sexuality should never be taught separately or only in relation to “other” literature, as they would not be an issue in all writing. If these questions are highlighted only in relation to “other” literature, the otherness is emphasized rather than problematized (hooks 38-39). When discussing a novel by a white middle-class male one should nonetheless take into consideration how class and ethnicity have affected and facilitated that particular writing. It is thus important to be aware of why one chooses to work with a certain piece of literature and discuss the context in which it was produced without labeling the literature entirely depending on what the writer’s background is. As long as the teacher is aware of these possible risks and accounts for them, *Purple Hibiscus* should not be a problem but only a resource in a Swedish upper secondary classroom.

Theoretical Framework

This essay will analyze and compare intercultural education to behaviorism and imitative education. Apart from understandings of these teaching philosophies, theories of mimicry, imitation, and identity will be used as theoretical framework. Finally communicative language learning will be explained, since this approach to teaching will be used in the discussion of how to teach *Purple Hibiscus* in the intercultural EFL classroom.

Liberal Education and Intercultural Pedagogy

Intercultural education is a branch of the more comprehensive term liberal education and therefore both terms will be explained here. In the essay though, the term *intercultural education* will be used, since this term is more common in Sweden.

Liberal education has its roots in John Dewey's reformist pedagogy. According to the Swedish educational researcher Gunnar Sundgren, Dewey has had a huge influence on today's school system in Sweden. The idea that education should originate from the students' own experiences and interests so that learning feels meaningful derives from Dewey (Sundgren 79). Group work and teaching that focuses on problem solving are examples of Dewey's practical teaching methods that have been used a lot, and continue to be in Swedish classrooms (Sundgren 79). As will be shown later, group work works well together with intercultural education, because it is a democratic work model. Dewey also argued that learning is an active process that goes on within the student. Students are thus not passive objects that the teachers can teach whatever they want, an idea that behaviorism promotes (Phillips 33).

In *Teaching to Transgress* African American studies scholar bell hooks describes liberal education as an education where everyone, regardless of background, is invited and active (hooks 8). In a liberating education opposed to a traditional one, both the students and the teacher are responsible for creating a learning environment, a dynamic classroom where everyone is active and where knowledge is constantly renegotiated (hooks 159). Like Dewey, hooks believes that personal experience is important in the classroom because it enhances learning and includes everyone (hooks 84). It is also vital to the learning process that the students can relate to the subject (hooks 87), something that Dewey said almost 100 years ago (Phillips 38-39). She maintains that everyone's experiences are unique and equally valuable in the classroom (hooks 84) and claims that "the more students recognize their own uniqueness and particularity, the more they listen" (hooks 151).

The Brazilian Pedagogue Paulo Freire, by whom hooks is inspired, introduces two types of education in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: the "banking concept" of learning and a "problem-posing" education. The banking concept of learning means that the students get a lot of information put into their heads by an omniscient and superior teacher and then they repeat and imitate it later, on tests etc. The students are seen as passive receivers of knowledge, like empty boxes that are to be filled with contents by the teacher (Freire 72). The problem-posing education focuses on communication between the teacher and the students (Freire 79). In order for the communication to work, the teacher and the students have to be partners and equals (Freire 75). Students have to be viewed as conscious human beings, who teach the teacher and each other, as much as they are being taught. The role of the teacher is not to be an authoritarian leader, but to present problems and investigate and create knowledge together in a dialogue with their students. Like hooks, Dewey and

Lahdenperä, Freire argues that the education has to have relevance for the students for effective learning (81). Furthermore, problem-posing education creates critical thinkers, whereas the banking system disables critical thinking (Freire83). Hence, this problem-posing education and intercultural education are related as they share the same values and learning objectives.

As early as 1985 the Swedish parliament decided that all education should have an intercultural perspective (Andersson and Reinfetti 5). Pirjo Lahdenperä, a leading scholar in the field of intercultural education in Sweden, maintains that intercultural education is not a subject, but an approach that should be practiced in all subjects (Lahdenperä 11). It is a general concept that covers intercultural teaching and learning as well as communication, school development and intercultural pedagogical research (Lahdenperä 13). She refers to Yvonne Leeman who points out that the term *intercultural* indicates that cultures meet and interact, unlike the term *multicultural* which instead implies that two cultures live side by side in a static relationship (13). The prefix *inter* refers to human interaction, and *cultural* to the systems of meaning that supply order and direction to a person's life (Lahdenperä 21).

Intercultural learning contains three main aspects, according to Lahdenperä. The first is student activity and teaching based on the students' experiences. The second aspect is called "culture contrasted perspective" which means that the students (and the teacher) should be confronted with different ways of thinking and different value systems in order to learn to be more open-minded. The third aspect is linked to the second, as it has to do with emotional work with one's own ethnocentrism. The intercultural learner should not use his/hers own lived experience and upbringing as the norm and the only "truth", but should understand that everyone has one's own "truths" (Lahdenperä 24-25). Finally an intercultural learning process ultimately intends to develop a critical self-awareness and the ability to revalue and revise one's own history, culture and values (Lahdenperä 23-24).

Interculturality is thus an ongoing process that focuses on tolerance, mutual understanding, equality and social justice (Lahdenperä 15). These values are explicitly spelled out in the Swedish National Curriculum. The English shorter version of the National Curriculum for upper secondary school states: "Education should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based" and "the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people are the values that the education should represent and impart" ("Curriculum" 4). A goal common to all national programs in the upper secondary school is that the students learn to:

“use their knowledge as a tool to:

- formulate, analyse, test assumptions, and solve problems,
- reflect over their experiences and their individual ways of learning,
- critically examine and assess statements and relationships, and
- solve practical problems and tasks.” (“Curriculum” 8).

According to Katarina Andersson and Monica Reinfetti, teachers can prepare their students for life in a multicultural society both through their attitude and their teaching. They think that an intercultural perspective helps the students take advantage of their previous knowledge and in that way improve their school results. An intercultural approach also actively confronts xenophobia with knowledge, which is necessary in a tolerant and open society (Andersson and Reinfetti 5). Hence, intercultural education is established in the National Curriculum and recommended in research. More research on intercultural education will be described in the Previous Research section, together with research on literature in EFL teaching and how teaching literature and interculturality works together.

Behaviorism and Imitation in Education

Behaviorism is an educational branch that started to develop in the end of the nineteenth century (Phillips 21). It is closely linked to an imitating pedagogy. The foundation of behaviorism lies in changing a behavior (=learning) by conditioning. The classical conditioning was developed by the Russian scientist Pavlov, who tested how dogs could be conditioned to produce saliva by only hearing a bell ring, after he had rang the bell several times during their meals (Phillips 23). He noticed that a natural stimulus (food) could be replaced by new stimulus (bell) and still it created the same response. The operant conditioning was invented by E.L. Thorndike who studied cats that he had locked into boxes. If the cats pushed a lever they would be free or get a fish, i.e. a reward. Thorndike observed that when the cats did this a couple of times, they learnt to push the lever faster and faster. Based on this experiment Thorndike maintained that learning takes place when the correct behavior is rewarded and with practice the learning increases (Phillips 25). Skinner brought these thoughts further when rewarding pigeons in many steps along the learning process, so that they got encouraged to continue in the correct path (Phillips 27). In this kind of learning, the learner is a passive receiver of stimuli, and the teacher (or scientist) is active when figuring out new ways of learning.

The concept of imitation in this essay derives from the post colonialist Homi Bhabha's theories in the chapter "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture*. The theory of mimicry describes how colonized people mimic the colonizers' culture and in that way help the colonizers' behavior and values remain the norm in the colonies. During colonization, these so called *mimic men* held the empire together by serving as British supervisors in the colonies (Bhabha 85). For the mimic men the profit of mimicry is that they gain social status by assimilating to and acquiring some aspects of the white man's "superior" culture. Of course not everyone in colonized societies can be mimic men, but only a few who are chosen by the colonizer. Also, the white man will never let the black native become fully one of them, and therefore mimicry always has to represent difference or "Otherness," as well as the sameness of imitation. Consequently the colonial subject receives an incomplete identity or a "partial presence". They become "*almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha 86). This means that the mimic man is left in a "third space", neither a member of the white Western society nor of the black, because as the mimic man abandons his own culture he is usually seen as a deserter (Bhabha 88). Furthermore, the colonizer has the power over this process and decides what knowledge the mimic men are given access to and thus what they can mimic. This means that the mimic men have limited knowledge of the colonizers' culture they are supposed to mimic, and therefore they can never completely become members of that society (Bhabha. 86). As Bhabha states, mimicry is not so much re-presenting as it is repeating which means that there is an essential slippage somewhere between the original and the mimesis (88). This slippage has to exist, because colonization and discrimination against the native is justified by the colonizer's superiority, and if the difference between colonizer and colonized is erased colonization can no longer be justified.¹

The story in *Purple Hibiscus* is set after decolonization, which happened 1960 in Nigeria, and so the mimic men are not functioning literally as British "guards" in the colonies. The theory is still relevant though, since there is much evidence in the novel that mimicry still exists on some levels and that the process of mimicry helps to maintain Britishness and European culture the norm which is superior to the indigenous cultures.

¹Bhabha exemplifies the purposes of mimicry by quoting Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute" from 1835, where he states that the mimic men are a group of interpreters "between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Bhabha 87). Accordingly these mimic men have received an English education through missionary schools similarly to Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Bhabha's theory of mimicry is postcolonial, whereas behaviorism derives from behavioral science, so even if they both describe imitation as a teaching method, they are not the same. Even so, because both theories are visible in the novel and both depict imitation as a way of learning certain behavior, they are both relevant to this essay.

Identity in the Classroom

In the novel, identity and personal development are analyzed in imitative education and intercultural education. The definition of the term identity is borrowed from Paula M. L. Moya in "What's Identity got to do with it? Mobilizing Identities in the Multicultural Classroom". She divides identity into two categories, ascriptive and subjective identity. Ascriptive identity has to do with how others perceive us and are often "visible" and collective categories, such as gender and race as well as categories of religion or social groups. Subjective identity refers to the "inner self", i.e. how one identifies oneself, for instance how we describe our personality and values (Moya 97-98). This may also include components of race, gender, religion, ability, and so on, but the emphasis is upon a person's subjective experience of self. Moya suggests a realist view of identity. This means that the ascriptive and subjective identities are not seen as one static absolute identity, where a person's perception of self corresponds perfectly with certain inner characteristics as an essentialist would suggest. Neither is a person's identity so unstable that it can be simply changed at any time, in any way, as an idealist would say. Rather, a realist thinks that we are not totally determined by the labels society puts on us, but we can never be free of them either (ibid. 99). At certain times, places, and in certain situations we are offered certain identities, and therefore it becomes important that pupils in school are offered a wide variety of (positive) identities by their teachers and classmates. Moya exemplifies with Latino and African-American students who are very successful in elementary school but later begin to misidentify with education and perhaps even drop out of school (ibid 100). In the Swedish school there is historically a similar issue with integrating Roma children, whose family often has a poor and negative contact with education because of discrimination and fear that the children will be "lost" to the majority society and its values (Rodell Olgac 30). Moya calls this issue of falling back to destructive identities because of other people's prejudice "stereotype threat". The stereotype threat can be reduced if everyone in school works actively against the identity contingencies that some students face (Moya 100).

Finally Moya acknowledges the importance of mobilizing and recognizing everyone's identities as epistemic resources. The idea that a heterogeneous classroom is a rich one is a conception that is found in an intercultural pedagogy. Some practical examples of how to mobilize identities are to remember that every student is a complex human being, who has the ability to contribute constructively to the classroom activities, to denaturalize the students' identities in order to make them more open to difference, to teach critical thinking and not a particular ideology, to create an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation and mutual respect and finally to connect classroom activities and discussions to the students' daily lives (Moya 109-114). These values of teaching critical thinking, promoting every students' constructive contribution and embrace difference are closely linked to intercultural pedagogy (Lahdenperä 23-25) and to the humanist values promoted by the Swedish curriculum.

From Behaviorism to Intercultural Communicative Competence in EFL

Together with intercultural education, the Swedish National Curriculum also recommends communicative language teaching. This section describes the development from the behavioristic model of language teaching that emphasized imitation and grammar to today's focus on communicative competence in modern languages. Communicative language teaching is relevant to this essay since one of the aims is to analyze how *Purple Hibiscus* can be taught in EFL, and since the curriculum recommends the communicative method this approach should be a starting point when planning student activities.

Anna Greek mentions three paradigms of teaching modern languages, the first of which is called The Modified Direct Method. Prevalent throughout the 1970s in Sweden, this method focused on grammar and lexis, and it reflected a structuralist-behaviorist perspective on language learning (Greek 16). Learning was sequenced, which means that it was assumed that the learner had to master certain knowledge before proceeding to the next level. Apelgren maintains that The Modified Direct Method as a learning method was based on "parroting phrases instead of considering the creative and producing nature of language" (qtd in Greek 16). In this quote Apelgren shows that the structuralist-behaviorist method is based on imitation in that the students are supposed to "parrot" and imitate the teacher's words and pronunciation. According to behaviorism, imitation, practice and social reinforcement are central when learning a new language (Lundahl 146). Furthermore, language input is emphasized in this teaching model. Accordingly, the teacher's role is to provide their students with appropriate input and reward correct use of it. Mistakes should be

avoided and are immediately corrected by the teacher, whereupon the students have to repeat (imitate) the correct form in order to learn (Lundahl 146-147).

In the mid-1980s until today, the Communicative Language Learning approach replaced the earlier Modified Direct Method. Communicative language learning is emphasized in today's curriculum for EFL:

Undervisningen i ämnet engelska ska syfta till att eleverna utvecklar språk- och omvärldskunskaper så att de kan, vill och vågar använda engelska i olika situationer och för skilda syften. Eleverna ska ges möjlighet att, genom språkanvändning i funktionella och meningsfulla sammanhang, utveckla en allsidig kommunikativ förmåga (GY11 53).

“The education in the subject of English aims to develop the students' language skills and knowledge of the surrounding world so that they can, and dare to use English in different situations and for different purposes. Students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop comprehensive communications skills” (my translation).

In this approach language as a means of communicating with others is emphasized. Communicative competence is the goal of language learning, rather than perfect pronunciation or endless vocabulary (Greek 16). According to Johnson and Johnson, communicative competence consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (qtd in Lundahl 117-118). Grammatical competence concerns pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and syntax. Sociolinguistic competence has to do with knowing how to use the language in different situations and knowing how to put language components together to form sentences, and finally strategic competence refers to the ability to overcome communicative problems, for instance use body language or reformulations.

Finally, Lundgren defines intercultural communicative competence, as “an ability to bridge over two viewpoints, be able to interpret and understand other people's perspectives and question one's own” (Lundgren 50) (“förmåga att kunna överbrygga två synsätt, kunna tolka och förstå andras perspektiv och kunna ifrågasätta den egna förgivettagna tillvaron”, my translation). Since the National Curriculum today emphasizes communicative competence, I will take this perspective on language learning into account when I later give examples of how to teach *Purple Hibiscus* in the Swedish upper secondary classroom.

Previous Research

Previous Research on Literature in Swedish EFL Classrooms

Anna Thyberg's dissertation *Ambiguity and Estrangement: Peer-led Deliberative Dialogues on Literature in the EFL Classroom* from 2012 focuses on ideological and emotional dimensions of literature reading in the EFL classroom. She has done an empirical study of a literature project in an upper secondary school, analyzing student group discussions (deliberative dialogues), questionnaires, student texts and post-study evaluations. The students got to choose novels from a list provided by Thyberg and were placed in groups accordingly. In the end of the two month project, the students wrote an essay and evaluated the project. The theories used in the analysis are postcolonial studies, reader response theory and critical literacy. One theory that was used is Rosenblatt's reader response theory of reading as transaction. Reading is seen as a transaction since the reader has to "live through" other people's experiences (Thyberg 33). In the analysis Thyberg examines if the students were able to do this, to imagine a fictional world, "live through" and empathize with the characters and finally talk about these experiences in groups. She emphasizes that this is a difficult process, and becomes even harder when the students have to do it in another language (Thyberg 44). Surprisingly, Thyberg found that the students were able to formulate and negotiate values and live through the characters in the novels. Furthermore, through discussions of the texts, the representations of the texts changed as well as the individual student's opinions about the novel, and thus meaning was negotiated in the groups (Thyberg 290-291). In the evaluation the students also thought that they had learned to discuss and listen to each other and to analyze texts better (Thyberg 315-316). Group discussions are one way to adopt an intercultural perspective in language teaching, which will be explored more in the Discussion section.

In her dissertation *Reading Cultural Encounter. Literary Text and Intercultural Pedagogy* Anna Greek analyzes two novels used in Swedish upper secondary EFL classrooms, focusing on cultural encounters and intercultural pedagogy. The novels are *Across the Barricades* by Joan Lingard and *Fruit of the Lemon* by Andrea Levy. The study examines how identity, culture and difference are constructed via cultural encounters experienced by the main characters in the novels. She explores how literary texts can be seen as metaphorical "contact zones" where different voices and cultures interact and give rise to

something new within the text itself (Greek 7). In the discussion of the analysis of the novels Greek relates to the need for intercultural pedagogy in EFL classrooms in Sweden today. The intercultural classroom is a “contact zone” that renegotiates concepts of culture, difference and identity through intercultural communication. Greek uses postcolonial literary theory, cultural studies and psychoanalytic-linguistic theory in her analysis. She finds two different ways of perceiving identity and culture, essentialist or non-essentialist. In an essentialist way of perceiving the world, cultural identities are seen as static, fixed clusters of behaviors, values and beliefs. In a non-essentialist view cultures and identities can vary over time and space, and there are no predetermined ways of behaving or thinking just because you belong to a certain social or cultural group (Greek 46). Moya’s realist approach to identity, previously discussed, is also a non-essentialist view.

Greek’s dissertation is the only one I find that combines literature teaching and intercultural pedagogy in Swedish EFL classrooms, and since it is from 2008, it focuses on the old curriculum (Lpf94). Thyberg’s dissertation also concerns the previous curriculum. New research that uses today’s curriculum (GY11) is therefore vital to the area, and this essay hopes to contribute to that.

Previous Research on Swedish Inter- and Multicultural Classrooms

Katarina Andersson’s and Monica Reinfetti’s report called *Att vara lärare i en mångkulturell skola. ”Interkulturell undervisning är till exempel att locka ur eleverna det de vet för att berika mig och hela klassen”* examines how teachers in multicultural schools in Sweden view their work situation. To answer that, the authors have conducted a case study in a multicultural school in a district of Gothenburg where 70% of the population has a “foreign” background² (Andersson and Reinfetti 21). The teachers in the study thought that working in a multicultural school is rewarding and stimulating but also demanding because the teacher has to be more patient and sensitive to the students’ needs. Also the teachers in multicultural schools need to be self-aware of their own culture and what they symbolize when speaking, behaving and choosing clothes. They also need a broad register of pedagogical repertoires to be sufficiently flexible and creative in their teaching, as they need to adjust their teaching to their students whose values and experiences vary more than in homogeneous classrooms (Andersson and Reinfetti 40). According to Andersson and Reinfetti, teachers are key figures for developing school and contributing to the students’ future. Therefore the teachers’

²The term foreign background (utländsk bakgrund) is the authors’ and it is not explained in the report

approach to their students is vital to the school's and the students' future. An intercultural approach helps the school remain a democratic and equal place and the students' results can even be improved when the teacher knows how to take advantage of the previous knowledge of every individual (Andersson and Reinfetti 5).

Ulla Lundgren's dissertation *Intercultural Understanding in Teaching and Learning English –An Opportunity for Swedish Compulsory Education* explores how intercultural understanding through EFL can be developed in the Swedish comprehensive school. Within the intercultural EFL education she has found three discourses that she analyzes: research discourse, authority discourse and teacher discourse. *The intercultural speaker* is an important notion within the research discourse. The aim of language education is to become an intercultural speaker with communicative competence rather than a native speaker. Foreign language learners can never become as fluent as native speakers, and so it is bad pedagogy to have the unreachable native speaker as the norm in the EFL classroom. Of course language proficiency is important and should be taught but in an intercultural education focus lies in intercultural communicative competence described above (Lundgren 49-51).

The authority discourse contains mainly official texts and school documents published by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), such as national curriculums and other national and international law texts. All these texts that Lundgren has examined advocate an international perspective and intercultural understanding (Lundgren 79). The teacher discourse is examined through interviews with 10 EFL teachers in secondary school. Lundgren finds various opinions about the importance and the difficulty of teaching intercultural understanding. Many of the teachers think that intercultural education is not possible in EFL unless the students have an appropriate vocabulary and thus some think that teaching pure language skills is more important than to teach interculturality (Lundgren 203). Others think that intercultural understanding is important, but difficult to get at, since the students have to experience cultural encounters rather than simply talking about it (Lundgren 203). However, similarly to Greek's theory of literature as metaphorical contact zones (7), this essay promotes reading literature in the intercultural classroom in order to experience cultural encounters. Hence, it is not necessary that the students themselves represent heterogeneity in order to have an intercultural approach in teaching. The aim of this essay is to show that behaviorism and imitative education can be oppressive, as opposed to intercultural education which promotes liberal values of tolerance, mutual understanding, equality and social justice. Through literature these intercultural values can be taught both

implicitly by encouraging the students to respect and understand difference within the texts, and explicitly by talking about these values in relation to literature.

Previous criticism of Purple Hibiscus

Adichie's 2004 novel *Purple Hibiscus* has been examined by literary scholars who focus primarily on religion, patriarchy or colonization and not on education. Still there are several similarities between my reading and the two readings presented below that focus on religion and patriarchy, as the theme of authority is central in both my argument and theirs. The patriarchal father of the narrator is Eugene. Eugene and ultimately God function as strong authoritative figures for Kambili, and the dichotomies of tolerance/intolerance and critical thinking/imitation exist in both an educational and a religious perspective. Intolerance and imitation of the colonial subject are present in the novel in the character Eugene while Aunt Ifeoma and Father Amadi symbolize tolerance and critical thinking, as they question the authority of the colonial church. The young girl Kambili's negotiation of issues of authority and her experience of the dichotomy between Eugene on the one hand and aunt Ifeoma and Father Amadi on the other, are central to my analysis and therefore the critics presented below are relevant to this essay as they too recognize these issues.

Anthony Chennells discusses two kinds of Catholicisms in "Incultured Catholicisms in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*", one Eurocentric and one that is inculturated to suit Nigerian culture. According to Chennells, Eugene represents the Eurocentric Catholicism as he is careful not to let any Igbo culture influence his faith. In church only English or Latin is supposed to be heard and no singing of Igbo songs is allowed. Eugene refuses to be in contact with his "pagan" father and his children are not allowed to eat anything when visiting their grandfather, as if they could become contaminated by the indigenous religion. Furthermore, the church St. Agnes that Eugene's family goes to has a European design, and Kambili initially believes that God is more present in that church than in other churches in Nigeria (Chennells 269). Kambili's aunt Ifeoma practices the other type of Catholicism, the one that is inculturated in Nigerian traditions and more liberal. Father Amadi also belongs to this progressive inculturated faith, where Igbo songs are allowed, respect to the indigenous religion is shown and a more liberal way of life encouraged. This is shown throughout the novel, one example being when Father Amadi sings Igbo hymns in the middle of Mass (Chennells 269). Chennells argues that Adichie belongs to a generation in Nigeria that does not question Catholicism as a part in Nigerian culture but rather criticizes

the Eurocentrism that is present, and that we can see clearly in the novel embodied in Eugene (Chennells265).

Cheryl Stobie has also analyzed *Purple Hibiscus* in her article “Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*”. She argues that Adichie is a reformist who advocates a progressive, equal and liberal Catholicism that is open to difference. Stobie maintains, much like Chennells, that Eugene represents a conservative Catholicism that is arrogant and refuses to accept difference or even listen to people who disagree with him (Stobie 423). Eugene belongs to a generation that is in between the traditionalists that his father Papa Nnukwu belongs to and the reformist generation that promotes what Chennells would call an inculturated Catholicism (Stobie 424). Stobie suggests that the uncertainty of being a middle generation makes Eugene absolutist in his faith. Eugene is a direct product of colonialism whereas father Amadi has taken the colonizers’ faith and transformed it to suit contemporary Nigeria (Stobie 424). According to Stobie, Papa Nnukwu is represented as a sympathetic and forgiving person as opposed to Eugene, but Adichie does not idealize the pre-colonized traditions, but shows that they are sexist, as for instance women are not allowed to look at the most powerful spirits at the masquerade (Stobie 424). This is very interesting, as it shows that Adichie is not “taking sides” with either the pre- or post- colonization culture, but rather stays in the middle observing pros and cons with both, and more importantly prefers a renewal and fusion of both. The title *Purple Hibiscus* is a hybrid form of the originally red flower which Stobie points out, is a symbol for the hybridity that should be accepted in the Catholic Church in Nigeria (Stobie 429).

In conclusion, Chennells’s and Stobie’s readings are similar as both focus on religion, Eugene as a product of colonialism and aunt Ifeoma and Father Amadi as his opposites in several ways. This essay will broaden the reading of the novel to include an educational aspect. *Purple Hibiscus* will be analyzed from an educational perspective, focusing on behaviorism and imitation as a teaching method, in contrast to an intercultural education which promotes critical thinking and questioning of authorities.

The novel

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a contemporary Nigerian writer. In the end of *Purple Hibiscus* there is a profile of the author, where Adichie says that Chinua Achebe is her hero and has been for as long as she can remember (Garner 2). Achebe's influence is observable in the very first lines of the novel when Adichie connects her text with one of Achebe's most famous novels *Things Fall Apart*: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion (...)" (Adichie 3). Adichie also says that Achebe gave her "permission to write about my world" (Garner 3), because Achebe wrote about the Nigerian experiences before her. In an interview for the TV show "African Voices" on CNN, Adichie explains how Achebe symbolically gave her permission to write about things she knew from own experience, other themes than children playing in the snow and eating apples, which she could not relate to at all ("African Voices"). In the same interview, Adichie describes her writing as a child: "All the characters had blue eyes". She says she was a "successfully brainwashed child", who was inspired by the books she read, which all came from the British world ("African Voices"). Adichie believes this is the case for many children in previously colonized places. She wanted to write about colonialism when writing *Purple Hibiscus* and says she thinks that every African writer does without meaning to, because "the way we are is very much the result of colonialism -the fact that I think in English for example" (Garner 4).

Nigeria is a very heterogeneous country divided geographically and culturally into the Hausa Muslim north and the Igbo/Yoruba Christian south (Dawson and Larrivé 921-922). Historically Nigeria was divided into three different colonial territories, North, South and Lagos, which were all administered independently. Because of its history, it is problematic to see Nigeria as one nation that shares one culture and common national literature. Instead, Nigeria is one of the largest producers in the world of Anglophone postcolonial literature and the production is ever-growing (Dawson and Larrivé 921). English has thus become the language of the Nigerian literature. In the 1980s Achebe wrote that if Nigeria "wishes to exist as a nation it has no choice in the foreseeable future but to hold its more than two hundred component nationalities together through an alien language, English" (Dawson and Larrivé 922). Dawson and Larrivé argue that Adichie belongs to a generation that no longer sees English as alien, but as a component in contemporary

“Nigerianness”, and thus writes beyond the postcolonial. The fact that she thinks in English is also proof that she does not consider English alien.

Adichie wrote *Purple Hibiscus* in 2004. The novel has been called a Bildungsroman (Stobie 421) and depicts the life and personal development of the 15 year old narrator Kambili. She and her older brother Jaja live restricted lives in fear of their patriarchal and strictly Catholic father who abuses his family. Kambili and Jaja have strict schedules to follow every day that regulate sleep, eating and studies. When a military coup overthrows the Nigerian government and their father’s progressive news magazine is in danger, Kambili and Jaja go to live with their aunt and cousins and there they discover a whole new way of bringing up children and learning, where having fun, questioning authorities and taking responsibility is encouraged. Aunt Ifeoma, as a university teacher, symbolizes an intercultural approach to teaching, where critical thinking and personal independence is encouraged. Kambili’s father Eugene on the other hand, represents an imitative education, where submissiveness and dependence towards authority is forced upon the learner.

Analysis of the Novel

Purple Hibiscus is a Bildungsroman, which means that education and learning is a main theme in the novel. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin defines the Bildungsroman as a “more or less autobiographical novel, reflecting an author’s desire to universalize personal experience in order to valorize personal identity” (Hoover Braendlin 77). In a Bildungsroman the reader follows the protagonist’s gradual self-development and change of character. According to Hoover Braendlin the protagonist in a Bildungsroman often retells her/his story years later (77), which is the case in *Purple Hibiscus*.

The analysis will mainly focus on Kambili’s learning and development from a reserved and passive learner to an independent young woman who can think for herself. The first section of the analysis focuses on imitation as a teaching method, and exemplifies how Kambili’s strict upbringing has not allowed her to think critically and develop a personality of her own. Instead she imitates her authoritarian father, believing that everything he does is unquestionably good. The second section will describe how an intercultural pedagogy is present in the novel through the characters of aunt Ifeoma and her children. In the aunt’s

home, the children are encouraged to develop their own identities and critically examine and question the world.

Imitation and Behaviorism in the Novel

The protagonist and narrator Kambili gets an education at home from her patriarchal father where the “true” values are taught by listening to the authoritarian father and memorizing the content. This memorizing resembles what Bryan Warnick refers to as *product-oriented* imitation (Warnick 69). Product-oriented imitation is part of an oppressive education and aims to reproduce the same product that somebody else produced before. An example of this is copying (plagiarizing) a book somebody else already has written. This does not stimulate creativity or critical thinking. Similarly, Kambili is not supposed to come up with a new, independent product, but to “plagiarize” her father’s behavior and values. At home Kambili is not allowed to question her father, but obeys and imitates him, and in that way learns good behavior. If she fails in her imitation she gets punished, often in a cruel fashion. This resembles the behavioristic way of modifying behavior by reinforcement. The core of behaviorism is that the learner is encouraged to a certain behavior and led away from other behavior because of rewards and conditioning. Thus people are formed and their behavior modified, regardless of their previous knowledge or own will.

The privileged Catholic school that Kambili goes to also teach the “true” values and seems to advocate a traditional pedagogy which resembles the “banking concept” of learning that Freire introduces. This view of education is oppressive not only because the teacher is seen as superior to the students, but also because it implies that the students are totally ignorant and have to be helped by the teacher (Freire 72). In Kambili’s school the facts do not seem to be placed in a meaningful context and the students do not understand why they learn, but only do as they are told by the authoritarian teacher. When Kambili mentions school she usually talks about reading books and memorizing facts, or sitting quietly and listening to the teachers and memorizing what they say: “I memorized what the teachers said because I knew my textbooks would not make sense if I tried to study later. After every test, a tough lump like poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back” (Adichie 52). Also, as the quote indicates, there is not any joy in learning, only anxiety about not succeeding. Kambili describes how, when she tries to study with a text book in front of her, the letters just blur together while she thinks of other things (e.g. Adichie 204), an indication that she does not really know what to do with all the information found in the

books. In addition, the information does not seem meaningful for her life and she does not find any joy or purpose in learning, other than avoiding punishment by her father. This is understood in the novel when Kambili gets her grades at the end of the term, and finds out she is only second best in her class. She is terrified of what her father will do, and the semester after that she studies hard, not because she enjoys it but because she is afraid of not coming first again. She even mentions that she does not understand anything of what she is studying at this point, but still she ends up coming first in her class. Her lack of self-reflection of her learning is evident when she has to study the number 1/25 hard to make sure it does not say 7/25 (Adichie 52). This indicates that she has only learnt facts by heart without reflecting. Obviously, this is the opposite of what an intercultural education stands for. The concept of bringing in the students' experiences and previous knowledge is totally absent, as is the critical thinking and the joy and excitement of learning that according to hooks belongs to a liberal education (hooks 145).

Even if the analysis focuses on Kambili's education, her father Eugene is an important character, since he educates her. Mimicry as a theme is very evident in Eugene. He has become the mimic man that Bhabha describes: a native in the colonies that works for the empire as a supervisor to preserve British values and retain colonial power hierarchies. Indeed, the novel is set after decolonization when Nigeria is an independent country, so retaining colonial power is not the goal. But Eugene has been conditioned by colonialism and neo-colonialism, and he considers Western culture as superior to indigenous Nigerian culture, by adopting Christian and Western values and forcing his family to do the same. He helps the church economically which makes the (colonial) church an even stronger power in society. Furthermore Eugene does not talk Igbo in public and does not want his children to do it either because English sounds more "civilized" (Adichie 13). The Western products in his factories also indicate the influence West has on him.

Learning by imitation is closely linked to mimicry, as the mimic men learn how to behave by imitating the colonizer. Hence, Eugene as a modern mimic man has got his knowledge of Western culture and religion by imitation. His closest friend and ally is the white priest Father Benedict, the only character who he seems to look up to and from whom he learns Catholicism and white values. Eugene's imitation is evident in his punishments of what he thinks is unchristian behavior. Once he punishes Kambili and Jaja by burning their feet with boiling water because they have slept in the same house as their grandfather, i.e. walked right into sin according to Eugene's words (Adichie 194). Afterwards Eugene tells Kambili that in his youth he once committed the sin of masturbating, whereupon "the good

father” he lived with punished him by burning his hands with hot water by (Adichie 196). He says he is thankful that the father did that, because he learnt never to commit sin again. Eugene is grateful to his Western education and all his white teachers who have taught him “true” knowledge and values, and he now copies their teaching methods, no matter how extreme they are. Eugene justifies his assaults on his family by saying that the punishments are for their own good, to learn the true way of life, which he has learnt from the white culture. This belief that his ways are superior and the only correct ones has a lot to do with education. Eugene advocates an education through imitation, free of critical reasoning and the students’ own voices.

There is much evidence that neither Eugene nor Kambili, for much of the novel, knows how to practice critical thinking or develop ideas of their own. Eugene needs everything he does and everything he thinks to be verified by the church, an example being when he is reluctant to let Kambili and Jaja go to Aokpe to see the apparitions, because the church has not verified them yet (Adichie 99). Kambili never knows how to behave or what to say, until afterwards when she gets a reaction from her father. One example is when she does not kneel to a bishop because she thinks it is “an ungodly tradition”. This rule, of course, was only valid when kneeling to a traditional leader was in question:

Mama had greeted him [the Igwe] the traditional way that women were supposed to, bending low and offering him her back so that he would pat it with his fan made of the soft, straw-colored tail of an animal. Back home that night, Papa told Mama that it was sinful. You did not bow to another human being. It was an ungodly tradition, bowing to an Igwe. So a few days later, when we went to see the bishop at Awka, I did not kneel to kiss his ring. I wanted to make Papa proud. But Papa yanked my ear in the car and said I did not have the spirit of discernment: the bishop was a man of God; the Igwe was merely a traditional ruler. (Adichie 93-94).

This confusion shows that Kambili is not able to and not allowed, to think critically about why one should kneel and in what situations. Indeed, she does not have “the spirit of discernment”, because this is something that requires real-life experience and independent thought. Also she is definitely not allowed to develop her own opinions and decide herself when she thinks it is important to kneel, she only defers to authorities.

The behaviorists did not mention punishments as much as rewards, but punishments are also a response to undesirable behavior, and therefore work in the same way.

Kambili's behavior is very much shaped by imitation of a role model and reinforcement. The reinforcement is mainly in the shape of punishments if she fails, but also when she succeeds she feels proud as Eugene smiles at her or taps her shoulder. For Kambili her father's approval is very important and often she wishes that she had said something smart that Jaja says, when she notices her father's approval. And of course, as a teacher, one cannot underestimate the power of reinforcing and rewarding good behavior/work in the classroom. A positive comment from the teacher often stimulates the student to continue working even harder. The problem with this kind of behavioristic learning, however, is that Kambili does not understand why she is learning, and not even what she is learning, but only memorizes facts and behavior out of fear and an anxious wish to please her father. The cats in Thorndike's study surely learn their new behavior only to get free, not with the thought that the new knowledge is something they could use again in other situations. The new skill does not become integrated with previous knowledge, and will probably be forgotten when the rewards stop coming and the exact same situation is no longer present. Accordingly, we cannot have our students rely on getting positive feedback all the time, but they have to see other values of learning than that.

Finally, silence and silencing is a theme connected to imitation and oppressive education. Kambili is so afraid of her father and perhaps God, that she has become silent. Amaka wonders why she "talks in whispers" and never laughs (Adichie 117), and her classmates think she is "a backyard snob" (Adichie52) because she does not talk to them. She carefully controls herself by being silent: "I pressed my lips together, biting my lower lip, so my mouth would not join in the singing on its own, so my mouth would not betray me" (Adichie 138-139). This scene is when Father Amadi visits Ifeoma for the first time while Kambili is there, and they sing in their prayers during dinner, which is an ungodly tradition according to Eugene. Father Amadi tries to help Kambili talk, think for herself and enjoy life, but it takes a while before she dares to let go of her self-control. The first time Father Amadi acknowledges Kambili's silence during the same dinner scene, she wants to apologize, but no words come out:

"I haven't seen you laugh or smile today, Kambili", he said, finally.

I looked down at my corn. I wanted to say I was sorry that I did not smile or laugh, but my words would not come, and for a while even my ears could hear nothing" (Adichie139).

When Father Amadi finally manages to get Kambili to laugh, she is surprised to hear her own laughter:

“You haven’t asked me a single question”, he said.

“I don’t know what to ask”.

“You should have learned the art of questioning from Amaka. Why does the tree’s shoot go up and the root down? Why is there a sky? What is life? Just why?”

I laughed. It sounded strange, as if I were listening to the recorded laughter of a stranger being played back. I was not sure I had ever heard myself laugh.” (Adichie179).

This passage shows not only Kambili’s awkwardness towards her own laughter, but also how Father Amadi tries to teach her questioning and critical thinking. Towards the end of the novel Kambili’s voice is heard and she sings along with Amaka’s music without knowing:

“You’re singing along,” she [Amaka] said after a while.

“What?”

“You were singing along with Fela”.

“I was?” I looked up at Amaka and wondered if she was imagining things”.
(Adichie227).

According to hooks, breaking students’ silence is an important aspect of a liberal education, as hearing and respecting everybody’s voice goes along with democratic and equal values. In an intercultural classroom everyone should be heard, and hooks even requires shy students to read their notes to each other in class and participate in order to break the silence and thus the oppression (hooks 40-41).

Identity is closely linked to education, as the students develop in different directions depending on the education they receive. In an education based on imitation, the learner identifies with a leader/teacher in a passive process. As the novel begins, Kambili has not chosen herself who she wants to be, she has not developed opinions on her own, and she does not even have the power to decide what she wants to do in her spare time, or what she wants to wear. The rigid schedules made by her father determine what she does every day. She cannot wear pants because it is sinful for a girl, she is not allowed to watch TV and when Amaka asks her about music it turns out she never listens to any music (Adichie 118). Clothes, interests, opinions and taste all contribute to both the ascriptive and the subjective identity that Moya (97) describes, and they help create an image. The ascriptive identity concerns categories of identity that others assign to the individual. The categories Eugene

mold Kambili into of course affect how others perceive her. The most obvious of the ascriptive identity categories that Eugene force upon Kambili is religion: Kambili is forced to be Catholic and is not allowed to question it. Kambili's style and behavior in school, makes her classmates think she is has an attitude of being superior to them. This "attitude" is actually fear and submissiveness towards her father. Accordingly, Eugene controls how others perceive her. Kambili's ascriptive identity is beyond her control. Of course, the ascriptive identity is always somewhat beyond individual control, but still we try to create a certain image that we wish others to see. The subjective identity however, should be in the individual's control, but Kambili does not even have the power to define her inner self. Instead she receives her father's values and personality without being able to question it first. She cannot question them because she has never been introduced to other ways of thinking and living. Even choosing a confirmation name for herself is done by her father, and she does not even think about doing it herself (Adichie 204). Warnick maintains that in a liberal education, the students should be introduced to several role models and ways of living in order to be able to choose an identity and lifestyle that suits them (Warnick 70-71). He takes taste as a metaphor: by being served several tastes of life, the students can develop their own "good taste". Thus, the educator's role is to provide their students various possibilities and experiences so that they get the tools for creating a good taste of their own. Kambili's lack of choice and power over her own identity can be linked back to Warnick's metaphor of developing a "good taste" of one's own. Obviously Kambili has not got the opportunity to choose her own life style, as she is only introduced to things that her father thinks is "good taste".

Intercultural Education in the Novel

Aunt Ifeoma is a symbol for intercultural education in the novel. She teaches her children to become critical thinkers and unique individuals with their own views on the world. Her teaching method can be compared to Freire's "problem-posing" education, where students are seen as conscious human beings, who teach the teacher and each other, as much as they are being taught (Freire 79-80). Furthermore, problem-posing education emphasizes critical thinking, creativity and true reflection (Freire 83-84). Ifeoma also teaches at the University of Nsukka. Universities are traditionally independent from the state and encourage freedom of speech and critical thinking. Ifeoma says many times throughout the novel that she is a strong proponent of these values, and her conviction is ultimately what gets her fired, as the state

starts to interfere in the university's business. A concrete example of how Ifeoma protects the democratic values of respect and freedom of speech and teaches these values to her children is when her daughter Amaka asks her if Kambili is abnormal. She answers: "Amaka, you are free to have your opinions, but you must treat your cousin with respect" (Adichie 142). Amaka asks this after she has had friends over and Kambili has not been able to socialize with them at all. Another time Ifeoma hits Obiora when he questions her friend Chiaku right to her face. She says: "I do not quarrel with your disagreeing with my friend. I quarrel with how you have disagreed. I do not raise disrespectful children in this house, do you hear me?" (Adichie 245). Although striking one's child is not legally sanctioned or socially condoned in Sweden, the novel presents this incident as an example of how important respect towards other people is for Ifeoma. Therefore these two incidents exemplify intercultural teaching. Amaka and Obiora are free to have opinions and encouraged to say them, but they have to show respect towards other people and different opinions. Respect and tolerance are key words to intercultural education as is the importance of everyone getting heard and hearing different voices and opinions.

In Aunt Ifeoma's house Kambili and Jaja become amazed and confused when they notice a way of bringing up children that is completely contrary to the one they have experienced at home. Their cousins Amaka and Obiora engage in advanced political discussions where they show that they have created their own views by critically examining the world and getting insight in different perspectives and worldviews. One example of this is when they tell Kambili about a conversation between Ifeoma and one of her colleagues at the university. The colleagues talk about how the university has become a place of control and dishonesty and that Ifeoma's name is on a list of disloyal personnel because she tells the truth about the governmental control. Amaka and Obiora both know about this and can reason about whether their mother should continue being a rebel or not. Kambili's response to their argument is: "Aunty Ifeoma told you that?" (Adichie 224), which shows that she is not able to contribute to a discussion on this level. Towards the end of the novel, Kambili realizes how Ifeoma has educated her children to become critical and conscious citizens, in the scene when she is observing the boys that Father Amadi trains for high-jump championships.

It was what Aunty Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realized then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It

was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn't. (Adichie 226)

In this quotation Kambili not only realizes how their cousins develop by adding personal responsibility as they grow older, but also reflects on the fact that she and her brother have always studied of fear, a fear of getting punished if they do not come first in their class. Kambili's cousins are active learners, they have to jump over the rod themselves by actively learning new skills, whereas Kambili and Jaja are seen as passive learners who need to imitate and be subjected to conditioning. This quote reflects what Warnick calls *process-oriented* imitation (Warnick 69). In process-oriented imitation the goal is that the learner imitates a process by which someone has produced something. This means that a new writer tries to imitate an experienced author in the writing process, but still writes a book with his/her own ideas and comes up with something new. Ifeoma teaches her children to imitate a process, to scale a rod and develop gradually until they come up with a new "product". Thus, Ifeoma does not want her children to be like her, but she shows them how to develop and create their own unique identities. The children follow her path, imitate the process, and come out as independent individuals. Furthermore, learning by scaling a rod gradually also reflects Lev Vygotskij's famous educational concept of the "zone of proximal development", which means that children learn gradually when being properly challenged and encouraged (Phillips 57).

Ifeoma's liberal way of bringing up her children involves a lot of laughter and speaking, as opposed to Eugene's. She tries to teach Kambili to use her voice and stand up for herself, which is explicitly shown once when Amaka is mocking her for not being able to cook properly: "Aunty Ifeoma's eyes hardened- she was not looking at Amaka, she was looking at me. *O ginidi*, Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back at her!" (Adichie 170). Earlier in similar situations Ifeoma has scolded Amaka for being disrespectful, but here she seems tired of Kambili's submissiveness. Ifeoma's attempt to teach Kambili to talk back succeeds, and both Amaka and Kambili herself are surprised to hear Kambili defend herself. Also, it is not until Kambili starts learning things at aunt Ifeoma's house that she starts enjoying to learn. When she learns to peel yams and cook she also understands the value of learning, she wants to learn and she knows how to use her new skills. This learning does not create anxiety as her learning at home or in school does. hooks resists the belief that pleasure in the classroom means that the students do not learn, and says instead that it is important to have fun in order to learn, and having fun is not the same as not doing intellectual work (hooks 145).

As previous scholarship has shown, Father Amadi advocates a progressive view on religion that “inculturate” Catholicism so that it suits the native culture. He brings in the indigenous culture in his Masses by singing Igbo hymns and he shows solidarity and understanding towards the traditional Nigerian religion and culture. Still there are some scenes where his liberal views are questioned. For instance when he asks Amaka about her English confirmation name and she refuses to choose one, he says that she should not quarrel because “(...) it is the way it’s done. Let’s forget if it is right or wrong for now” (Adichie 272). He does not want to engage in a critical discussion about why they have to pick English names for baptizing and confirmation, but tries to make Amaka stop questioning traditions. He says instead that this tradition does not matter because no one is forced to use the names they choose anymore. Even aunt Ifeoma gets annoyed by Amaka’s questioning and asks her to pick a name so Father Amadi can go and do his work, which shows that her fighting spirit is fading. Amaka however refuses to do so, and thus is not being confirmed. This has a lot to do with identity. In this statement, Amaka shows that she has developed an independent subjective identity which allows her to choose her way of life herself. She has a clear view of who she is and what she thinks. When she chooses her own path, it also affects her ascriptive identity that is how others see her (Moya 97). She proves that she has a measure of control over her own identity and is free to develop the personality and image she feels comfortable with. This is all part of the intercultural education she has received. Intercultural education celebrates difference and therefore forming a unique personality based on active, critical exploration of the world is encouraged. Amaka questions Catholicism, but has still chosen to follow it, she has chosen to listen to “culturally aware music” and of course she chooses her friends, clothes and spare-time activities herself. All these elements are part of her identity and form who she is and how others see her, and because she is able to choose her own style and opinions she has control over her personal development. Because Amaka is allowed to observe and have many role models and take a stance she is able to create her own “good taste” (Warnick 70-71) of life, her own personality and style.

Discussion

Purple Hibiscus as an example of “the other” is discussed in relation to teaching EFL in Swedish upper secondary schools. I will give some examples of how to take on an intercultural and communicative approach in teaching the novel in a Swedish context.

Teaching Purple Hibiscus in Intercultural, Communicative EFL Classrooms

This essay argues that reading literature in EFL classrooms is part of an intercultural education, as students encounter different cultures through literature and hence teaching literature gives opportunities for creating understanding towards difference. When working with *Purple Hibiscus* in the classroom, it is important to recognize the context of where and by whom it is produced, as hooks (38) argues. Always when reading literature, there should be a discussion of race, gender, ethnicity and other relevant categories. These could be highlighted both in relation to the writer and the characters in the novel. This is vital in order to minimize the risk of creating boundaries between the reader and the novel.

According to hooks, students from marginalized groups know that their voices have not been welcomed within the school institution, an awareness that can silence them, and therefore the pedagogy has to respond to that (hooks 83-84). In an intercultural classroom these “other” voices have to be heard, as intercultural education promotes values of equality, solidarity and understanding towards difference (Lahdenperä 15). *Purple Hibiscus*, being set in a Nigerian context, is a text that may represent difference, “the other”, for many EFL students in a Swedish classroom. Therefore it is a suitable novel to bring in to the intercultural classroom, in order to show students that difference is valued and integrated in the school. When tolerance towards difference is shown through the choice of teaching material, minority students may feel valued and welcomed to participate in the classroom. Freire (88) discusses the power to name and define the world, which historically belonged to the white male/ the colonizer. According to him, there has to be a dialogue between oppressors and oppressed, where the oppressors have to give room for the oppressed, and the oppressed have to take the place they deserve, in order for the communication and hence the education to be liberal and equal (Freire 88). To deal with postcolonial literature like *Purple Hibiscus* in class is a way of giving the oppressed “other” power to define his/her world. In order to break the oppression and enable a dialogue between equals, new perspectives have to be integrated and tolerated in

school, and this can be done through reading and discussing issues of otherness in *Purple Hibiscus*. An intercultural learning process aims to develop a critical self-awareness and ability to revalue and revise one's own history, culture and values (Lahdenperä 23-24). When meeting different perspectives in literature this revaluation is made possible and tolerance and understanding can emerge. Furthermore Lahdenperä (24-25) maintains that the students should be confronted with different ways of thinking and different value systems in order to learn to be more open-minded and work emotionally with one's own ethnocentrism. This goal is also met when working with *Purple Hibiscus* in class.

As mentioned earlier, intercultural communicative competence in EFL is the ability to bridge over two viewpoints, to interpret and understand other people's perspectives and question one's own (Lundgren 50). *Purple Hibiscus*, as an example of "the other" enables and encourages students to interpret and understand other people's perspectives. Furthermore, by discussing similarities and differences between the students' lives and Kambili's life, the students are encouraged to connect their own culture and experiences with someone else's, which is to bridge over two viewpoints. In classroom discussions the students also meet each other's viewpoints about the novel, which forces them to try to understand and respect different interpretations and opinions. A concrete topic to discuss in class could be how Eugene's and Ifeoma's children and upbringing of children differs. An analysis of which way of bringing up children is more intercultural and why, similar to the conclusions drawn in this essay, would enrich the discussion and emphasize the intercultural perspective even more.

According to Lundahl, working in groups is an effective method for communicative language learning, since everyone has to participate (Lundahl 134). In a large classroom there will always be some students who remain quiet, which hooks acknowledges (41). As mentioned earlier, her strategy to break the silence is to have everyone read their notes to each other (hooks 40-41). Getting everyone to participate and getting everyone's voice heard is a democratic and intercultural way of teaching and a lesson in recognizing and listening to each other (hooks 41). If the students are on an advanced level and somewhat used to working in groups, the novel could be discussed in a more open discussion, where the students are given different roles and fields of responsibility. One leads the conversation, one can be an initiator who is responsible for effective time using, another summarizes key points, another is a recorder who shares main points to the rest of the class and writes a summary, and finally one can be an observer who does not participate orally, but reflects on how the discussion works and gives feedback to the group in the end (Lundahl 137). If the students are not used to group discussions, a more guided discussion may be necessary. One way to do this

is to prepare statements about the novel that the students talk about and take a stance for or against. This model Lundahl calls “pyramid-discussion” (Lundahl 136). Always before the group discussions, no matter the students’ level, the teacher should help the students by going through how to start a conversation, how to agree/disagree, conclude etc. (Lundahl 135).

In conclusion, in order to take on an intercultural perspective when teaching “other” literature such as *Purple Hibiscus*, there has to be an open discussion about culture, differences and similarities and the students should be encouraged to relate the novel to their own lives and experiences as focus on the learner is a key to intercultural education. By addressing issues of difference and otherness, but also emphasizing similarities between the student’s and Kambili’s education and development, there should not be room for alienation and xenophobia. Finally, the teaching methods in class should be intercultural, and one way to enhance democracy and student participation in the classroom is to arrange group discussions.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to explore how intercultural and imitative education are depicted in the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, and to show how it is possible to work with the novel in the Swedish upper secondary EFL classroom, using an intercultural and communicative approach to language teaching. In the analysis of education in the novel two different teaching methods were found: a behavioristic one that focuses on imitation and an intercultural education that focuses on critical thinking and personal development. The thesis was that imitative education can be oppressive and therefore intercultural education that advocates tolerance, respect and equality is preferred. Eugene symbolizes the behaviorism and imitative education and aunt Ifeoma represents intercultural education in the novel. Kambili learns from home to imitate her father’s behavior and values, to submit unquestioningly to authorities and to avoid developing and articulating her own ideas. In Ifeoma’s house she encounters an intercultural upbringing of children where critical thinking and questioning of authorities are encouraged. Her cousins are viewed capable and active learners who are encouraged to take responsibility of their learning and personal development, whereas Kambili is a passive learner who is forced to imitate the father’s “good” behavior.

In the discussion, the novel was connected to the Swedish classroom context. First of all, *Purple Hibiscus* may represent difference for many Swedish EFL students, and thus bringing in this novel to the EFL classroom enables students to understand and reflect on other people's perspectives, which is in accordance to intercultural education. By reading "other" literature the other is also allowed to define his/her own world. Finally minority students can feel more integrated and welcomed to participate when the choice of teaching material proves that diversity is valued. Working in groups is a democratic and intercultural work model since everyone gets the chance to participate and contribute to the discussion. Furthermore group discussions emphasize the communicative competence, where practical, real-life language skills are developed and students learn to understand and respect each other's different views and interpretations. In conclusion, *Purple Hibiscus* works very well in the Swedish intercultural EFL classroom, as the students get an example of a different way of living, as well as the opportunity to practice communicative English in democratic discussions where they meet each other's different perspectives and opinions.

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