



**UiT** The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

**Intercultural competence in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif"**

Elisabeth Hjelde Rosenvinge

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## **Abstract**

The thesis that follows investigates how Morrison's debut novel *The Bluest Eye* and only short story "Recitatif" can be implemented into Norwegian EFL classrooms to foster intercultural competence. In the Kunnskapsløftet 2020 (LK20), the National Reform of School Curriculums, intercultural competence is emphasized as a crucial resource that must be challenged and developed in students. However, the core curriculum and competence aim communicate little to no guidance to the practical approaches teachers can utilize to facilitate these goals. Additionally, scholars' contributions to the term intercultural competence are conceptual, and as of yet there is no clear consensus on what the dimensions of intercultural competence are, what they consist of, or how to achieve them. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the overall conversation of to reach clarity. *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif" portray the effects of racial injustices on individual characters. Finally, the thesis discusses didactical concerns related to measuring intercultural competence and incorporating fiction that depicts controversial topics. By discussing central didactical issues and potential solutions pertaining to intercultural competence and literature, this thesis hopes to bring clarity to the term and inspire those interested to expand their literary horizon and to search for new ways to incorporate literature to their classrooms.

The field of intercultural competence and literature's contribution to developing students' attitudes and knowledge, and how these attributes can be applied in skillful intercultural encounters later in life is still a narrow area of research. The literary research made in conjunction with this thesis has showed there is a need for evidence-based approaches to developing intercultural competence through teaching literature. Especially in the transition from LK06 to the ambitious LK20, future and current teachers need to explore their creative abilities when working with literature's potential. Simultaneously the research field needs to be expanded. Hopefully, this thesis has inspired its audience to contribute to the conversation as well.

## **Acknowledgments**

The completion of this thesis marks the end of my teacher's education at the Arctic University of Tromsø, and it is with great appreciation that I look back at these five enlightening years. This said, there are ...

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## 1 Introduction

In his article “From effective to affective learning? Fiction and intercultural competence in Foreign Language Education” (‘Fra effektiv til affektiv læring? Skjønnlitteratur og interkulturell kompetanse i fremmedspråksundervisningen’), Ohldieck establishes that literature in English Foreign Language education is «losing recognition» in favor to fact-based and non-fiction texts (2018, p. 29). It is argued that emphasizing the fictional affect may contribute to openness towards other cultures than your own through **mitigating** the readers’ established prejudices and assumptions of the “others”. Ohldieck summarizes further that EFL educators must dare to expand literary horizons, which demands innovation in the selection of fiction; the literature should stimulate certain emotions in the reader (2018, p. 29). Similarly, Vestli shares Ohldieck’s concern for the role of literature in EFL classrooms, declaring that fiction in Norwegian schools is a “neglected chapter” (2008, p. 4). She asserts that there is an inconsistency between the level and methods of instruction and selection of texts that teaching students encounter in university and the field of practice that newly educated teachers experience. The samples used on university-level English literature subjects are both more advanced and varied compared to what teachers are implicitly expected to teach in practice. Therefore, it has become a common occurrence that newly educated teachers focus less on extensive work on novels and short stories. Consequently, the role of literature has become “fractional” and a “rare occurrence, limited to a limited selection of classical poems” (Vestli 2008, p. 4), while linguistic approaches to teaching in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms are thriving. In other words, the value of literature has been neglected over the decades in Norwegian EFL classrooms.

The context of the current climate in Norwegian schools raises essential questions about literature’s potential in the English Foreign Language classrooms to seek answers, not only to the benefit of the teachers but for our pupils as well. The thesis will investigate how post-slavery literature may be utilized to facilitate for students’ development of the new curriculum’s “interdisciplinary topics” and “core values”, specifically *Democracy and Citizenship* and *Identity and Cultural Diversity*, respectively. The thesis will investigate historically the role of the literature in previous Norwegian curricula, as well as provide examples of how cultures in continents outside of Europe have been portrayed in previous textbooks in Norwegian schools. The selection of curricula and quotes from textbooks will

help illustrate the need for a deeper understanding of other cultures and the students' cultures. With this foundation, the introduction will offer an overview and discussion of the term intercultural competence and its connections with the values of the new curriculum *Kunnskapsløftet 2020* (also known as LK20). In this section, I will introduce the main pillars of intercultural competence and its significance for not only students performing well at school, but also for personal growth into adulthood in a globalized world. Central elements of intercultural competence will be divided into three dimensions, knowledge, attitudes, and skills, through an examination of seminal researchers' contributions to the discourse. The elaboration of intercultural competence will also highlight central issues to the term, such as the lack of clarity of content and practical approaches in teaching situations. To illustrate the potential outcomes of lack of precision and consensus to the term, the discussion will seek to current developments in the political climate in the States. Although some arguments that have been made in the debate are valid, the section of the thesis will emphasize that the main issue of the debate is rooted in an unclear understanding of intercultural competence. This debate will help illustrate the importance of clarity.

Morrison's debut novel *The Bluest Eye* and short story "Recitatif", both of which depict post-slavery perspectives in the United States, will be the foundation of the thesis' analysis. The texts have been chosen based on subject matter, and their contrasting narrative approach to their similar topics, which in turn facilitates for the thesis to provide a variety of strategies available to EFL educators on how to approach the values and competence aims of LK20. My analysis of Morrison's texts will adopt a character analysis approach, in which I investigate how the characters communicate and relate to each other in light of intercultural competence and LK20. Following the analysis, a chapter containing a discussion of practical pedagogical approaches to *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif" will be provided. The objective of the didactical chapter is to emphasize the potential fictional narratives can have to develop intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In addition the didactical chapter will discuss central issues pertaining to measuring intercultural competence and suggest appropriate ways of which teachers can assess students' intercultural competence. Finally the thesis will address central complications when it comes to teaching fiction that depicts controversial themes like Morrison does with her narratives. Ultimately, the thesis will show how *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif" portray intricate intercultural relationships that not only challenges attitudes, knowledge, and skills between

characters within the stories; the readers are challenged to critically reflect on their competence as well, which harmonizes with the ideals presented in *Kunnskapsløftet 2020*.



## 2 The role of literature in Norwegian curricula

Historically, literature and language proficiency has had a central role in Norwegian curricula but with contrasting objectives with each renewal. A brief investigation into the role of literature in the curricula demonstrates how the connection between literature and intercultural competence, and its subsequent social benefits, are increasingly emphasized by each reform. By examining for instance *Mønsterplanen 1974 (M74)* (Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet 1974), the curriculum emphasizes the importance of *intensive* and *extensive* reading (p. 150). Intensive reading involves introductory studies and practice to secure students' comprehension of the texts and mastery of pronunciation, which is "expected to be supervised by the teacher" (p. 150). On the other hand, extensive reading was claimed to maintain students' proficiencies that have already been taught. *M74* also highlighted that extensive reading of fiction should stimulate the readers' interest in foreign languages, which demands a wide variety of literature available for the students. The cultural benefits of reading fiction are only indirectly mentioned, stating that "one should keep in mind that fiction may provide useful information and competence" (p. 150). The successor, *M87*, discusses more specifically the intercultural benefits of foreign language learning by introducing one of the main goals of the English subject:

"Help the students to understand English as a tool for creating valuable knowledge and experiences, and opportunities to navigate oneself better and more directly with people and social conditions in other countries" (Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet 1987, p. 206).

Furthermore, *M87* dedicated the short, yet separate section "*Knowledge about the English-speaking world*" (Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet 1987, p. 208), stating that literature, songs, and poems may provide knowledge and experiences about other cultures outside of Norway. This section is followed by a section related to how students' may adapt their language to effectively communicate with their interlocutor, which will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. Similarly, *Læreplanverket 97 (L97)*, also known as "*Reform 97*") maintained that foreign languages cause the students to familiarize themselves with other cultures, which provides the foundation for developing "respect and increased tolerance,

other ways of thinking, and the students' understanding of their own culture. With this approach the students' identities will be strengthened." (Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet 1996, p. 223, *my translation*). Additionally, *Reform 97* discusses the connection between foreign languages and "cultural awareness" (1996, p. 223), which is reflected through the competence aim which states that the student shall "work with culture and social conditions in English-speaking countries [...] through knowledge about English-speaking countries' literature" (1996, p. 232, *my translation*). Additionally, M74, M87, and L97 provided specific works of literature that should be incorporated into English classrooms such as Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. A common theme in the previous curricula mentioned in this section is that they are more geared towards "learning about" culture rather than attempting to view the world from different cultural perspectives.

In the current LK20, on the other hand, the curriculum has shifted its focus from specific works of literature to more generalized competence aims, which encourages students to analyze and interpret works of fiction from English-speaking parts of the world. Furthermore, the framework for the five basic skills include literacy and reading as a central skill for developing identity and social relations during students' education as well as later in life (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). Combined with the curriculum's core values, such as democracy and citizenship, and the overall vagueness of the competence aims, it is up to the teachers to take these factors into consideration when planning their classes. The shift from detailed descriptions of competence aims and literature lists does however not communicate that literature has lost its influence on students' academic and personal growth. Therefore, the recent developments from previous curricula to the new LK20 corresponds to Ohldieck's argument: instead of the curriculum providing specific works of fiction to include in EFL classes, the teachers are encouraged to expand the literary horizon. Through the analysis and didactical suggestions that follow, the thesis will propose ways to analyze and implement Morrison's fiction in a Norwegian context to inspire further expansion of the literary horizon.

### 3 Historical context

One may pose the question of why Norwegian schools should incorporate Morrison's narratives in their classes in the first place, which is not unjustified considering that the post-slavery effects in Norway are not as prevalent in comparison to the United States. The population of people of African descent is much higher in the States, which sparks more motivation to focus on African American perspectives in their education system.

On the other hand, one could argue that because people of African descent in Norway are a comparatively small minority in the Norwegian society, the white Norwegian majority is already distanced from the post-colonial and minority perspectives. In such contexts, the minorities are more exposed to the repercussions of European colonialism. Such repercussions create polarizing attitudes that distinguish "the West" and "the Others" (Røthing 2018, p. 43). Historically educational contexts have reproduced the stereotype which states that "the Others" are uncivilized, irrational, or underdeveloped. Such polarization of "the West" and "the Others" can be found in Norwegian textbooks in Geography:

"Now we will visit the continent in which the negroes belong. The mother carries the child in a bag on her back all day, while the man dances a wild war dance and plays on tin cans and empty bottles [...]. [W]e also meet many barefoot blackies with shiny top hats, stiff collars and modern winter coats. They mostly resemble grotesquely adorned monkeys in a circus" (Fagerjords geografiske lesebok, quoted in Koritzinsky 2017 p. 137, *my translation*).

In this section, Africans are generalized and described as primitive, in addition to being represented in what the modern society would label as racially insensitive, despite being a culturally and ethnically diverse continent. In textbooks published approximately 30 years later, one can find similar reproductions of stereotypes:

"Visitors from Europe may find that people in the Near Orient mostly live poorly. The conditions would be better with improved cleanliness. – Millions of people suffer

from a terrible eye infection and turn partially or completely blind. That would have been avoided if they would use as much soap and water as we do in the North.”

(Miscellaneous textbooks published between '61 and '67, quoted in Koritzinsky 2017, p. 137, *my translation*).

Although the latter quotation is not nearly as racially charged as the former, it still contributes to reproducing the stereotype that “the Others” are primitive and insanitary and that “us in the North” possess intelligence about hygiene than others supposedly do not. Furthermore, suppose the statements presented in the quotes given above were factual. In that case, they do not attempt to elaborate extensively on *why* people in Africa and Asia live under these social conditions or the historical developments that may have caused these conditions. In other words, the students who grew up with these portrayals of other cultures were not invited to understand the world from a different perspective than their own. Instead, students were encouraged to view entire continents in a vacuum as homogenous units. Examples such as the ones above raise the question of to what extent textbooks portray other cultures in a primitive light facilitate students’ intercultural competence when encountering foreign cultures later in life.

Furthermore, the risk of including perspectives in the classrooms like those presented in the quotes above is that stereotypes may be reproduced through generations. It is essential to note the social context in which previous curricula such as M74 and M87 were produced. Compared to today’s standard, the world was not nearly as interconnected as today’s globalized world, mainly through the Internet. Therefore, developers of previous curricula may not have been as concerned with children and teenagers interacting effectively with multiple cultures multiple times a day. By having access to every corner of the world through our technological devices, we are more likely to interact with cultures other than our own. These aspects are reflected in LK20 as a central motive for preparing our students to become democratic, global citizens.

To combat the potential reproduction of harmful stereotypes, intercultural competence and related values (such as democracy and citizenship, critical thinking, and deep learning) have increasingly influenced Norwegian curricula. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to have knowledge of what it means to be interculturally competent and how one can work to improve their own and their students’ competence.



## 4 Intercultural Competence

### 4.1 Defining intercultural competence – the pedagogy of discomfort

The term “intercultural competence” has gained traction in recent years through the Council of Europe’s work on defining and describing the benefits of intercultural competence and has worked its way into the Norwegian curriculum. However, it is apparent that finding common ground on the definition of intercultural competence among researchers has been a complicated task to fulfill. Descriptions of the term *intercultural competence* are vast and simultaneously vague, and therefore there is no clear consensus on the specific abilities that intercultural competence involves. Another factor that further complicates the vagueness of the term is the variety of terminology, and intercultural competence is closely related to other concepts (Wolff & Borzikowsky 2018). Wolff and Borzikowsky themselves define intercultural competence as “a complex of abilities that are needed to interact with people from other cultures adequately and effectively” (2018, p. 489). While their definition and similar definitions were made by several researchers, these descriptions leave one wondering what precisely the abilities comprise of and what it means to interact effectively with other cultures.

To add to the conflict, several other terms are used synonymously or are closely related to intercultural competence, such as intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural competence, or cultural intelligence to name a few (Wolff & Borzikowsky 2018 p. 489). Variations of the term may be geographically dependent as well, for example the terms “diversity competence” (Røthing 2020) and “critical race theory” (CRT) are common in Norway and the United States respectively. Although CRT is more adapted to American society and history, CRT shares important aspects of Røthing’s variation of intercultural competence. In her book, Røthing asserts “diversity competence” as “the pedagogy of discomfort” which was first described by Megan Boler in 1999 (2020, p. 60). “The pedagogy of discomfort” can be described as a practice which engages students and teachers to critically investigate established truths related to for instance racism, social justice, and injustice. The assumption is that in order to challenge established truths and stereotypes one must face the uncomfortable emotions that may arise. As a result, facing discomfort

may create space to develop empathy and change by unveiling and questioning deeply integrated attitudes and habits that may maintain imbalanced structures of power (Røthing 2020, p. 60). In short, discomfort can under appropriate pedagogical practice be regarded as a resource. In the States, however, the discomfort that CRT activates has caused great debates across the nation. In the state of Tennessee for instance, a bill was passed in May of 2021 which banned teaching practices that may cause “discomfort, guilt, anguish, or another form of psychological distress because of the individual’s race or sex” (S.B. 623, Ten. 2021). Recent developments in American school politics display the importance of thorough knowledge of intercultural competence so that its ideals do not get lost in translation. Intercultural competence is not about pointing fingers at a population to shame them for the actions of their ancestors. Intercultural competence aims to acknowledge that for instance racial injustices have occurred. Although racist institutions such as slavery and segregation have been abolished in the States, it is essential to discuss how these institutions shape generations and contribute to reproduction of racism unless such ideas are challenged actively. Therefore, the aim of intercultural competence, CRT, and synonymous theories is not solely to cause discomfort by shaming students for the past. Most of all, as the theoretical section will elaborate on, intercultural competence is about critical thinking and developing healthy interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it is crucial that students, teachers, researchers, and politicians are all on the same page regarding the foundational aspects of intercultural competence.

Generally, most researchers agree that the objective of intercultural competence is effective communication between two interlocutors of differing cultures (Barret et al. 2013, Byram 2020, Dypedahl & Bøhn 2018, Lund 2018). Within this brief, and seemingly straightforward definition there are multiple dimensions to consider when you have students who are undergoing intercultural learning. In addition to ensuring to understand the interlocutor and making oneself understood, one must think interculturally to maintain a good relationship with your interlocutor (Dypedahl & Bøhn 2018, p. 159). It is in the assertion of what components lie within the notion of intercultural *thinking* where incongruity arises. Among intercultural competence researchers, there are some scholars that have been more influential than others that may provide clearer answers to what intercultural thinking involves. In their final report to the Council of Europe advocating for developing intercultural competence through education, Barret et al. define intercultural

competence as “a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills” (2013, p. 7). Said combination shall then be applied through action, which will reap a magnitude of benefits, such as understanding and respecting people of different “cultural affiliations”, thus establishing “positive and constructive relationships with such people” (Barrett et al. 2013, p. 7).

In *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence – Revisited*, Byram suggests five dimensions of intercultural competence, which has become one of the most influential contributions in Europe (2020, p. 57). These dimensions are interlinked, meaning that each dimension cannot be attained in a vacuum. As figure 1 demonstrates, education is placed in the center as the primary area of intercultural learning. Outside of center one can find knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction. These dimensions can therefore be narrowed down to three main dimensions: *attitudes, knowledge, and skills*. Thus, the foundation of the following discussion of intercultural competence and analysis of Morrison’s characters will be the three dimensions.

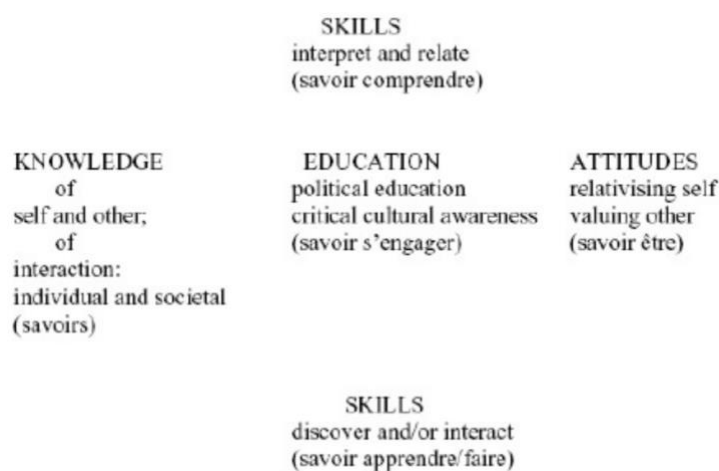


Figure 1 – five dimensions of intercultural competence (Byram 2020, p. 57)

In terms of attitudes, this dimension entails the ability to relativizing the self as well as valuing the other.

Intercultural attitudes are understood as a sense of curiosity towards other cultures and as intercultural sensitivity (Lund 2008, Wolff & Borzikowsky 2018). This element can then be understood as a prerequisite for intercultural competence – intolerant people are less likely to effectively and adequately encounter people of different cultures. Possessing



intercultural attitudes is viewed as imperative for realizing intercultural skills. Intercultural attitudes demand dynamic perspectives because the dimension not only require one to critique and evaluate others, but also oneself (Byram 2020, p. 57). Attitudes are frequently described as displaying curiosity and openness towards other cultures than your own. Some central values related to intercultural attitudes are “cultural sensitivity, “tolerance of ambiguity”, “respect for otherness”, and “empathy” (Lund 2008, p. 3). Lund further demonstrates how intertwined the dimensions are to each other, by highlighting that intercultural attitudes require the ability and willingness to questions assumptions and previous knowledge about cultures (Lund 2008, p. 3). Thus, the dimension concerning attitudes is linked to intercultural knowledge.

The knowledge dimension can be divided into two main categories (Byram 2020, p. 59). First, one should have knowledge about one’s own and their interlocutor’s social groups and cultures. Byram argues that some knowledge will always be present due to the process of socialization. Through primary socialization in the family and secondary socialization through formal education, most people acquire a certain national identity and culture (Byram 2020, p. 59). Ideas of culture and nationality can either be unconscious or conscious, in addition to having unifying or distinguishing qualities. An example of distinguishing qualities can relate back to the developments of CRT’s position in American education, in which the population disagrees on the value of teaching the effects of slavery and segregation. On the opposite side, ideas of culture and nationality having unifying qualities can be observed through the acknowledgment of Norway’s Samí population and their history, especially the “Norwegianization” period. Since the Norwegianization period acceptance and knowledge about Samí history and culture have increasingly gained focus in Norwegian schools, in addition to the implementation of the Samí government. Thus, the Samí people have gained recognition as a part of the Norwegian national identity and culture. These examples from Norwegian and American contexts also demonstrate the fluidity of national and cultural identities, and how formal socialization can have a strong impact on developing unifying, intercultural knowledge.

The second category of intercultural knowledge involves “knowledge about concepts and processes in interaction”, which is central for effective communication between interlocutors (Byram 2020, p. 59-60). Relevant concepts within this dimension are for example stereotypes and prejudice, which again relate to the other two dimensions

*attitudes* and *skills*. In addition to having knowledge about how stereotypes and prejudice impact a conversation, the knowledge dimension involves how people may express their cultural identity through linguistics (Byram 2020, p. 60). Although these concepts presented by Byram may at first glance appear reasonable, there may be logical difficulties when applying theory to teaching practice. To expect the teacher to teach and the students to learn about all the unique cultural differences that may impact future interaction is a grand expectation to make. This issue pertains especially to the English language because of its *lingua franca* status, meaning that students can through the English language meet and interact with people from virtually every corner of the world. However, this does not suggest that the educational institution should discard the idea of intercultural competence entirely. As a middle ground, one can use the largest English-speaking parts of the world such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, etc. as a foundation for the class. Learning opportunities through individual tasks where individual students can expand their interests to other English-speaking corners of the world should also be encouraged when possible. One important factor to emphasize in the knowledge dimension is the distinguishment between “knowing about” culture through declarative facts and statistics on a national level, and deep learning through interpersonal communication (Byram 2020, Lund 2008). By focusing on the latter approach, one counteracts the reproduction of harmful stereotypes and helps the students to develop sensitivity to the complexity and diversity of the cultures that they encounter in life. Thus, literature can perform as an optimal tool for facilitating intercultural competence due to the deep dive readers take into fictional characters’ perspectives and how they perceive the same world. Ultimately, the main outcome should be that the students are open to gaining or challenging their knowledge about cultures.

Previous knowledge that a person possesses acts, according to Byram, as a prerequisite for future interaction which in turn helps refine one’s knowledge related to culture (Byram 2020, p. 61). One’s ability to effectively interact pertains to the dimension that concerns itself with intercultural skills. Lund maintains that intercultural skills relate to what behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, or unacceptable and inappropriate, in intercultural encounters (2008, p.3). Like the previous dimension, the skills dimension can be distinguished into two components: skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery. To exemplify the former, one should have awareness of certain stereotypes that pertains to their interlocutor’s culture or social group to avoid conflict. Even “positive stereotypes” can

have harmful outcomes (Røthing 2020, p. 22). If a class learns surface-level declarative stereotypes presented as facts such as all African Americans are good dancers, then those who cannot identify with this statement may feel less-than and excluded from their cultural affiliation. In this sense, such “positive stereotypes” that are well-meaning can have harmful impacts on those who are affected. Negative stereotypes on the other hand, that reduces whole groups of people to problematic, immutable, and inferior cultural or biological traits lay the foundation for discrimination and stereotyping (Røthing 2020, p. 22). Therefore, the skills of interpreting and relating act as an extension of the previous knowledge one have about cultures. Byram argues that the skills of interpreting and relating are not limited to communication with interlocutors but can extend to interpreting and relating to documents (2020, p. 61). Therefore, utilizing fictional literature can be appropriate in terms of developing intercultural skills. The skill of discovery comes into play when one does not have any notable preexisting knowledge of the culture one interacts with. In short, it is a skill of discovering culture and building a framework of knowledge (Byram 2020, p. 62). It is especially important to build these values and skills in the modern, globalized world in which one can access the world and encounter a magnitude of cultures through social media. In order to be interculturally competent, one must exhibit sensitivity and openness toward other people’s cultural affiliations and build a foundation of knowledge that then can be utilized for effective communication. Ultimately, there is a demand for a clear definition and a functional approach for future teaching practice in terms of intercultural competence.

## **4.2 Intercultural Competence in the Curriculum**

The dimensions of intercultural competence are reflected in the latest comprehensive reform of the Norwegian curriculum, *Kunnskapsløftet 2020*, which directs teachers on *why* they should focus on intercultural competence in their practice but provides little guidance on *how* to approach this ideal. Reflections of intercultural competence can be observed in LK20’s *core values* and *interdisciplinary topics*, while advocations for fictional literature can be found in the *framework for five basic skills*. The elaboration that follows will demonstrate how the sections mentioned above of the core curriculum communicate great ideals and goals to achieve in education, while the competence aims are not as direct.

In the core values chapter, section *1.2 Identity and cultural diversity* (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022) one can find several manifestations of the theory behind

intercultural competence. For instance, section 1.2 is initiated by a statement which communicates that historical and cultural insight is essential for the development of pupils' identities, which in turn gives them an advantage in participating in a diverse society. Furthermore, it is stated that "the pupils must be given insight into how we live together with different perspectives, attitudes, and views of life" (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). It is elaborated further that through interactions with different cultural expressions and traditions that transcend the ones that we are familiar with facilitates for the development of our identities. In terms of intercultural competence, such traits that would be formed through cultural encounters are for instance the attitudes and values that the individual possesses, and how one approach and communicates with people of different cultural backgrounds.

Attitudes such as openness and curiosity towards cultures as well as intercultural skills are reflected through section 1.3 *Critical thinking and ethical awareness*, and 1.6 *Democracy and participation* (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). In the former section, it is stated that in order for new ideas to emerge the school shall facilitate for critical thinking surrounding established ideas by applying "theories, methods, arguments, experience, and evidence" (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). These values draw parallels to the knowledge dimension of intercultural competence. Additionally, skills of discovery and interpreting are represented in the core curriculum. Skills of discovery are represented through the emphasis that there should also be room for "uncertainty and unpredictability" in the process of critically evaluating existing knowledge as well as newly acquired knowledge (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). *Democracy and participation* pertain primarily to intercultural skills by focusing on how to apply intercultural attitudes and knowledge in practice by interacting with all members of a diverse society. Effective communication between groups of people in a democratic society is also emphasized as essential through the ideal that students shall learn "that people are different and learn to solve conflicts peacefully" (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). One can also observe similarities to intercultural attitudes through the promotion of attitudes that can counteract prejudice and discrimination.

Finally, the interdisciplinary topic *Democracy and Citizenship* advocates for educating students on knowledge and skills such as political participation and human rights, and how such democratic principles are essential for a democratic society to function. In the passage

that follows one can once again draw parallels to intercultural competence. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of knowledge and skills for participation and effective communication between minority and majority populations. Additionally, *Democracy and Citizenship* share a central element with intercultural competence which argues that skills and knowledge can never reach ultimate attainment. For a democratic society to function then its citizen must challenge each other with empathy and respect to maintain and for progression to take place:

“The teaching and training shall give the pupils knowledge and skills to face challenges in accordance with democratic principles. They shall understand dilemmas that arise when recognising both the preponderance of the majority and the rights of the minority. They shall train their ability to think critically, learn to deal with conflicts of opinion and respect disagreement. Through their work with the topic the pupils shall learn why democracy cannot be taken for granted and understand that it must be developed and maintained.” (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022).

LK20's core values demand a great deal of personal growth from the students not just during their 13 years of schooling, but also that they apply their intercultural competence in their adult life as well. The question that remains then, is how do the competence aims provide guidance and specific approaches to fulfill these ideals? By looking at the competence aims after the first year of upper secondary school (VG1), one can observe the lack of clarity in terms of practical approaches to implement in EFL classrooms. For instance, competence aims such as “read, analyse and interpret fictional texts in English” and “explore and reflect on diversity and social conditions in the English-speaking world based on historical contexts” (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022) are undeniably vast and vague. One can for example compare LK20's competence aims for English in upper secondary school with its predecessor's, *Kunnskapsløftet 2006* (LK06). LK06's curriculum for upper secondary school English (ENG1-03) contained 27 competence aims organized into separate categories, of which one category pertained to *Culture, society and literature* (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022). The equivalent in LK20's curriculum for English (ENG01-04) has reduced the amount of competence aims to 17 in addition to removing LK06's categorization. By compressing the competence aims and categories into fewer goals they simultaneously become ambiguous.

However, ambiguity should not be interpreted as discouraging teachers from incorporating more extensive work on fiction and critical discussions of culture. There are still competence aims that encourage the use of fictional literature as presented above. With the core values and interdisciplinary topics, the compression of competence aims should be interpreted as encouragement for creativity and expansion of the literary horizon in Norwegian EFL classrooms. From this point, the question that remains pertains to how English teachers can choose appropriate texts for their students.

### **4.3 Justification of text selection**

Before initiating the analysis of the intercultural benefits of incorporating Morrison's literature in EFL classrooms, the thesis will provide a justification for the selection of *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif". First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that post-slavery fiction through African American authors' perspectives is a vast category with a great spectrum of texts of different levels of difficulty, genres, content, and length. Additionally, post-slavery fiction is certainly not the only genre of fiction that may be utilized in terms of intercultural competence learning within the confines of the EFL classroom. Therefore, the analysis and discussion of Morrison's texts can serve as a contribution to the larger conversation of bringing clarity and practical approaches to promote intercultural learning. Ultimately, the two texts provided in this thesis serve as examples to illustrate their didactical potential, and hopefully to inspire future and current teachers to implement literature of similar nature as resources for building intercultural competence.

In terms of the curriculum, the teachers are given little to no direction on what type of texts or what level of complexity to assign their students in their instruction. As established in the previous section of the thesis, the Norwegian curricula have shifted away from providing a specific list of texts to not mentioning any texts at all. The implicit message to teachers that *Kunnskapsløftet 2020* communicates is that teachers are expected to evaluate appropriate texts for their students. Instead of relying on a comprehensive list of fictional texts and complementary methods of study provided in the curriculum, teachers need to seek other approaches when determining which texts may be appropriate for their class. In her book *Whole Novels for the Whole Class*, Ariel Sacks proposes five dimensions to consider when deciding on reading assignments for students: *development, identification level, reading level, thematic connections, and literary strengths* (2013, p. 37).

Sacks argues in the first dimension that the starting point of assigning a work of fiction to the class should be an evaluation of their developmental stage compared to the content of the text. Certain topics are more central in certain periods of development. For example, *Looking for Alaska* by John Green may speak to the developmental interests of older teenagers compared to for instance *Wonder* by Palacio. Attributes Sacks describe as central for upper secondary school students are among others:

“[d]iscovering that the transition from childhood to adulthood often involves a painful awakening to the harsh realities of the world, including depression, illness, and death. These titles discuss mature subjects and offer a safe avenue for students to discuss challenging topics” (Sacks 2013, p. 41)

Both “*Recitatif*” and *The Bluest Eye*, the latter in an inarguably high degree, cover such mature subjects that challenge the readers. On the other hand, Sack’s model simultaneously disproves of utilizing works outside of the realm of young adult literature (p. 42). From her experience, young adult literature appeal to students precisely because such novels are written with a specific target audience in mind. However, Sacks does not fully exclude classic literature as possible novels to study in class, and my text selection can be justified through the four dimensions that follow.

The second dimension considers the level of identification students experience when reading fiction, and to what extent the chosen text(s) function as “mirrors” or “windows” (p. 37). As the metaphor suggests, fiction that “mirrors” the plot will have content and characters that are familiar to the reader. On the opposite end, fiction that function as “windows” have storylines that are unfamiliar to the audience. In a Norwegian EFL context, it is less likely that students reading “*Recitatif*” or *The Bluest Eye* experience the texts as mirrors. By reading fiction that functions as a window into a different reality the students must challenge themselves by immersing into new perspectives as well as questioning their own view of the world.

Sacks further argues that the third factor to be taken into consideration is the reading level of the students, and correspondingly the texts’ level of accessibility. Teachers should consider students’ reading level and whether the texts are accessible to the whole class or portions of the class. This factor is dependent on the context of each class and its

circumstances. This thesis does not have a selection of students to test didactical approaches to Morrison's texts. Therefore, in the context of this thesis the discussion will assume a hypothetical group of students that are homogenous in terms of literacy. It is however important to note for future practice that in some instances works of fiction may only be accessible for a small portion of the class. In such contexts a work of literature can be assigned to individuals. Ultimately, this dimension is highly dependent on evaluating each class and students as individuals.

The next dimension considers the thematic connections with the topics that precede or follow the period in which the class works with the chosen text(s). Essentially, this dimension poses the question of whether the students are familiar with the themes of the texts or will be later in their education. Themes that are brought up in both "Recitatif" and *The Bluest Eye*, such as racism and segregation and their repercussions, are aspects that are frequently brought up and discussed throughout 13 years of education. Additionally, Morrison's themes can facilitate for interdisciplinary work related to democracy and citizenship. Especially Morrison's short story depicting historical events and increased social participation among the African American population can transfer from English to other subjects such as History. Similarly, Morrison's depictions of how social hierarchy and discrimination can lead to low-self-image in the minority population can be implemented into several other spheres such as Social Studies, Sociology, or Psychology in upper secondary school. Ultimately, the topics depicted in Morrison's literature are of relevance not only within the English subject but can extend beyond the EFL classroom. In other words, the text selection promotes complex, critical interdisciplinary discussions that can promote intercultural competence. These qualities argue in favor for implementing Morrison's "Recitatif" and *The Bluest Eye* as literary works to include in the upper secondary school syllabus.

Finally, Sacks suggests evaluating the formal literary strengths of the texts (2013, p. 62). Although "Recitatif" and *The Bluest Eye* have differing levels of literary complexity and length they both share Morrison's strong use of literary devices and complex relationships between characters.



## 5 Analysis

### 5.1 Literature and its impact on the intercultural dimensions

Before the character analysis of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif" one should consider whether fictional narratives can have convincing potential to alter the readers' intercultural competence. Can our students' intercultural skills, attitudes, and knowledge be curated through incorporating fiction in EFL classrooms?

As established in the theoretical section, intercultural attitudes can generally be described as a person possessing "curiosity and openness towards other cultures" (Lund 2008, p. 3). A person possessing intercultural attitudes is willing to question assumptions and previously acquired knowledge about other cultures, as well as their own culture. With this in mind, one could consider whether Morrison's fiction has the potential to impact students' attitudes towards culture. Research suggest that reading fiction can affect readers in both an interculturally competent direction as well as a in an interculturally unproductive manner. An example of the former can be found in for instance DeCoursey & Banerjee's longitudinal study of three readers of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in Hong Kong (2021). The subjects were interviewed about their views on dating, marriage, and divorce in heterosexual relationship prior to reading the play, after a seminar about the play, and finally after seven years. One of the findings showed how the participants views on both their own and their peers' relationships had changed after reading the play, which is interesting because the setting of the play is of great cultural distance from the Chinese culture. Elements that seem to have made a long-lasting impact on the readers that have been highlighted are "narrative structure and metaphor" (DeCoursey & Banerjee 2021, p. 161) and the scandalous ending in which Nora leaves her husband. Ultimately, the study suggests that critical analysis of literary devices and narratives that depict cultural differences can alter readers' perceptions of themselves and the world.

Another study conducted by Altenburger, et al. (2016) found similar effects among readers of E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The selection of subjects was a group of over 700 young, female college students of which approximately half of the subjects had not read any of the novels, and the other half had read the novels to varying degrees. Their results showed that those who had read at least one of the novels of the trilogy had stronger "ambivalent, hostile, and benevolent sexist attitudes" compared to the women that had not

read E. L. James' fiction (Altenburger et al. 20116, p. 460). The attitudes described in the analysis negatively affect not only perceptions of womanhood but manhood as well. While Anastasia gives in to Christian's needs in fear of ending up alone, Christian tells himself to "man up" and take whatever he wants. Participants who endorsed such gender roles described the trilogy as "romantic", which may be harmful if those learned sexist attitudes are applied to their real-life relationships. Although their research is not directly related to culture, the emphasis remains on the fact that fictional narratives and literary devices have the power to influence or potentially alter the readers' attitudes. Through Altenburger et al. and DeCoursey & Banerjee's differing methodology, one can point to one factor that could have impacted their results. The former study included seminars consisting of critical close readings of *A Doll's House*, while the participants in the latter were dependent solely on their own interpretations. Therefore, one can argue that planned, structured instruction is essential for developing a constructive long-term effect on the readers' attitudes. Ultimately, such learned attitudes and knowledge may impact how readers apply those attributes to intercultural interactions in practice.

The theoretical section established that there are opposing views on what intercultural knowledge consists of. Instead of focusing on statistics and sociological facts the learner should engage in in-depth learning and self-awareness as a supplement to "knowing about" other cultures and their own. The benefits of utilizing fictional narratives in the process of acquiring knowledge and awareness about other people's perspectives on the world have been observed by several scholars such as Bredella & Delanoy (1996). Although numbers and statistics can create an appalling impression on racial injustices, supplementing sociological facts with fictional narratives has powerful prospects in terms of developing intercultural skills like empathy (Bal & Veltkamp 2013, p. 3). Empathy does not inherently develop from reading fiction. It is maintained that emotional transportation into narratives is crucial for readers to sympathize with characters. Another perspective that supports the need for supplementing facts and statistics with fictional narratives relates to the term "psychic numbing" (Slovic 2007, p. 87). Psychic numbing describes a state in which one is predominantly exposed to quantitative information pertaining to tragedies or historical events, such as the number of African Americans that were affected by segregation. It is more demanding to experience and develop sympathy if one exclusively adheres to facts that pertain to millions of people. Through fiction that depicts close details of an African

American protagonist's experience of segregation, the reader is more inclined to emotionally transport into the narrative and empathize with the character on a more profound level. Therefore, fiction can be evaluated as serving distinctive functions such as personalizing issues presented in statistical facts and why certain themes such as racial injustice matter for future intercultural interactions.

## **5.2 Intercultural competence in *The Bluest Eye***

### **5.2.1 Claudia and Frieda McTeer and Pecola Breedlove**

Since intercultural competence is characterized by dynamic relationships between interlocutors, the character analysis will be conducted with multiple characters in mind and the development of their relationship with themselves and each other throughout the novel. At the onset of the novel, one can observe and analyze Claudia, Pecola, and Frieda's internalized racism as a product of 1940s marketing to children. As a brief reminder, intercultural attitudes not only focus on people's ability to cease judgment towards their interlocutor's meanings, beliefs, values, and behaviors, but one must critically evaluate their own perspectives as well. Through the society's marketing toward children one can observe the impact a lack of black representation can have on young children, which is established early in the novel through Claudia's reflections back to her childhood (Morrison 1970 p. 17). Claudia, being the youngest of the three girls, observed Pecola and Frieda's obsession with merchandise representing white girls. Instead of joining the older girls in adoring a Shirley Temple cup, Claudia rejects any fascination with the cup. Instead of adoration, Claudia feels resentment towards Shirley Temple because she "danced with Bojangles, who was *my* friend, *my* uncle, *my* daddy" (p. 17). The other girls do not seem to be bothered with the fact, which may be a sign of positive intercultural attitudes towards their white peers. Therefore, one could consider Claudia's irritation towards a white child actress and a black man being dance partners in movies is evidence against Claudia possessing intercultural attitudes. One could argue that if Claudia were to have ceased her judgment towards Shirley like Pecola and Frieda, Claudia could be happy that Bojangles and Shirley were the first interracial couple to dance together on screen (NPR.org 2014). However, it becomes evident that the girls are not preoccupied with what Shirley *does*, but they are focused on what Shirley *represents*. Claudia states clearly that what she cared about was humans her "own

age and size” (p. 18), followed by several paragraphs around her frustration towards dolls appealing to children representing white children exclusively. Here, Claudia reminisces about how she treated the white dolls she was gifted for Christmas in a completely different manner than she was expected to. Instead of cuddling her dolls lovingly at night, she remembers:

“Its hard unyielding limbs resisted my flesh – the tapered fingertips on those dimpled hands scratched. If in sleep, I turned, the bone-cold head collided with my own. It was a most uncomfortable, patently aggressive sleeping companion. To hold it was no more rewarding. [...] I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl treasured.[...] I could not love it.” (p. 18-19).

This excerpt demonstrates Claudia’s frustrations towards Shirley Temple and white baby dolls, and by extension the society’s favoring of the white majority population. The doll can in this instance be understood as a symbol for racist attitudes and beauty standards of the 1940’s. Claudia’s head collides with her doll’s white head, representing Claudia’s disapproval and unalignment of society’s favoritism towards white children. She does, however, want to understand *why* other children and grown-ups never gave her compliments on her appearance, which provokes Claudia to “dismember” the doll to find what elements made whiteness more favorable. In this sense, Claudia displays openness and curiosity towards the white majority. However, the majority does not reciprocate the same openness and curiosity towards minority children like Claudia and people of color in general. Later in the chapter Claudia states that she eventually learned to love Shirley Temple the same way that Pecola and Frieda did: “I learned much later to worship her, just as I learned to delight in cleanliness, knowing, even as I learned, that the change was adjustment without improvement” (p. 21). Through this segment of the novel, the narrative emphasizes how the society requires the minority to adapt to the expectations of the majority, leading to oppression. Before Claudia adjusted, communication with her peers was inefficient and she

was simply dismissed by Frieda and Pecola whenever she disagreed with them. Therefore, Claudia had to sacrifice her intercultural attitudes to assimilate.

In the discussion of the knowledge dimension of intercultural competence in *The Bluest Eye*, one can utilize the same excerpts used for instance in intercultural attitudes. Referring to the section in which Claudia discusses her desire to dismember white baby dolls we can draw parallels to the knowledge aspect. In this instance, Claudia exhibits awareness of society's prejudices and discrimination against the black population in Lorain and how that discrimination ultimately affects her peers. Furthermore, one can point to *the Doll Experiment* conducted by Mamie and Kenneth Clark in the 1960s. Their experiment demonstrated how decades of segregation had impacted children's perception of their own race. Black children had for instance decided that the black baby dolls were "bad", and they only wanted to play with the white baby dolls among many other findings revealing the children's internalized racism. In addition to providing information to the public on the harmful effects of segregation, and confirming black people's experiences, the Clarks' seminal experiment contributed to real societal change. In the Supreme Court verdict in *Brown v. Board of Education* Mamie and Kenneth Clark served as expert witnesses, and their work has been described to have played "a critical role in the legal battle to end school segregation" (Barker & Ukpong 2020, p. 658). There are two important factors to note from the discussion in this paragraph. First, the example from Morrison's fictional narrative and Mamie and Kenneth Clark's experiment reflecting black people's reality emphasizes the essence of the knowledge dimension of intercultural competence. While the doll experiment provides significant observations of segregation, it does not provide deep, emotional testimonies of the children's experiences. Therefore, fiction such as *The Bluest Eye* can be an effective supplement to sociological facts and statistics to enhance the students' knowledge of cultures such as the African Americans. Second, the applicability of Claudia's inner monologue on white baby dolls to both the attitude and knowledge dimension demonstrates the dimensions' codependency. Intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills cannot exist in a vacuum, and the development of one will influence another dimension.

It becomes clear later in the chapter that the adults did not only choose to ignore Pecola's pregnancy because she was a child who was assaulted by her father, but mostly because they did not think highly of Pecola's appearance. Claudia narrates that they "looked for eyes creased with concern, but saw only veils" (p. 188). The veil symbolizes the adults'

desire to protect themselves and hide from the reality of the situation rather than confronting the uncomfortable. In multiple conversations overheard by Claudia and Frieda, the adults reveal their lack of empathy for Pecola because of her appearance. Instead, they express judgement by saying that “[Pecola] carry some of the blame” (p. 187), “she be lucky if [the baby] don’t live. Bound to be the ugliest thing walking” (p. 187), and finally that there “[o]ught to be a law: two ugly people doubling up like that to make more ugly. Be better off in the ground” (p. 189). Claudia and Frieda’s response to Pecola’s tragic circumstances and following neglect from her family models how intercultural attitudes develop from just possessing knowledge.

This segment of the novel emphasizes an important part of intercultural competence that was pointed out by Røthing mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, which involves the importance of confronting the uncomfortable. In the case of Pecola, her parents’ and other adults’ constant neglect of her resulted in severe consequences in terms of her mental health deteriorating by the end of the novel. Therefore, the novel successfully encourages the readers to consider the power of skills such as empathy and compassion, as well as tolerance and openness towards people regardless of their outward appearance. After piecing together the conversations they overheard, and realizing that the adults were talking about Pecola, Claudia expresses the need she and her sister Frieda felt for saving Pecola and her child. Claudia and Frieda set aside the judgments adults had towards the Breedloves and focused on the health of Pecola and the baby growing in her womb. The language Claudia utilizes when depicting the fetus is significant, because she uses verbs with positive connotations. For example, she imagines the baby with “kissing-thick lips” and having silk-like skin (p. 188). On the opposite end, the depiction of what a white baby would look like with “synthetic yellow” hair, implies a reference to the abundance of white-baby dolls. Unlike the adults in Lorain, Frieda and Claudia had a desire to help Pecola and to ensure that her child could live. In other words, their capacity for empathy is much stronger. In addition, their empathy is expressed through action by discussing their options regarding how they can be of assistance to Pecola. They conclude with that praying to God and planting marigold seeds in their backyards – if they grew, Pecola and her baby would be okay (p. 190).

### 5.2.2 Pecola and Pauline and Cholly Breedlove

As discussed in the previous section, segregation has a central role in terms of causing systemic power structures that favors the white majority of the novel. One can observe an imbalance in intercultural competence on a societal level, and how the overall structure affects characters individually. A common theme among the African American female characters of the novel show openness and curiosity towards the white majority which is not reciprocated. The imbalance results in Pauline's self-resentment which she eventually projects towards Pecola as well.

One central consequence of Pauline's internalized racism is the difference in how she treats Pecola versus how Pauline treats other white girls. To exemplify this, one can touch on the scene in which Frieda and Claudia go to the house where Pauline works for white family to look for Pecola (p. 104). Pauline invites them into the kitchen while she goes to do her chores, and the daughter of the white family enters. As the white girl looks around rather nervously, she eventually asks the three girls where "Polly" is, referring to Pauline (p.106). While the nickname in isolation can seem harmless, it is rather astonishing considering Pecola refers to her own mother in formal terms as "Mrs. Breedlove" (p. 105). Claudia also addresses the contrast, stating that that would be "reason enough to scratch [the white girl]" (p.105). In other words, the unfairness is not only noted by the reader but expressed through the characters as well. The disparity is further enhanced after Pecola in the same scene accidentally dropped a hot pan of pie to the floor which not only caused a mess to clean up but burned her skin as well. As Pauline returns to the kitchen, she without hesitation ran to Pecola. The immediate reaction however not to check if she was okay or to comfort her but to scold her verbally and physically with a voice "thin with anger" which "abused Pecola directly and Frieda and [Claudia] by implication" (p. 107). The fact that Claudia and Frida who were innocent in the matter felt like criminals themselves in a situation they weren't involved in sends certain signals about Pauline's attitudes and skills. First, Pauline's actions and Frieda and Claudia's interpretation of the situation communicate how Pauline projects her internalized racism onto the children. This is further enhanced through how she treats the white girl who eventually began crying after witnessing the abuse. Although the white girl was not the one who got hurt in the situation, Pauline comforted her with motherly warmth and love with "honey in her words" (p. 107).

Therefore, Pauline displays a lack of central intercultural attitudes such as empathy towards children based on skin color rather than blood relations which ultimately impact her communication skills.

Pauline's underdeveloped intercultural competence was a product of internalized racism that had built up from living in a racist, segregated society. The chapter that follows depicts a thorough backstory on how Pauline's internalized racism had manifested through poor intercultural competence on a societal and an interpersonal level. Regarding the latter, Claudia narrates Pauline's feelings of discomfort around other black women (p. 116). The chapter communicates that Pauline's discomfort is rooted in certain expectations related to her physical appearance from her peers, as well as her dialect. In terms of her appearance, Pauline was ridiculed and alienated by other black women because she did not straighten her hair and her failed attempts of applying make-up in a similar fashion to them (p. 116). As discussed in an earlier section about the dimensions of intercultural competence, the term involves knowledge as well as an understanding of the varieties of accents and communication styles in differing cultures. In the same chapter about the backstory of the development of Pauline's internalized racism, it is revealed that the lack of tolerance regarding her accent from her surroundings contributed to the development. For instance, it is stated that the other black women threw "goading glances and private snickers at [Pauline's] way of talking (saying "chil'ren")" (p. 116). The other black women in her community lack intercultural competence in the sense that they do not exhibit openness and tolerance towards Pauline's accent being different than theirs. Therefore, Pauline experiences judgement from other black women in the community who also had internalized racist attitudes. Pauline's encounters with her peers demonstrates how society as a whole can impair individual development of intercultural attitudes and skills.

Pauline's experience with other black women was certainly not the only source promoting her internalized racism, as it is revealed later how popular culture which as dominated by white beauty standards had an impact on Pauline. When she was pregnant and eventually got bored of housekeeping, she found sanctuary at the cinema where she was introduced to physical beauty which Claudia declared "the most destructive ideas in history of human thought" (p. 120). Claudia's narration is then interrupted by the voice of Pauline in which she elaborates on how recurring impressions of white ideals of beauty had impacted her during her pregnancy. Pauline describes how going to the movies provided her



with pleasure and happiness which ceased once she returned home to Cholly (p. 121), indicating that watching movies provided her with an escape from the harshness of reality. In the theater she had was able to imagine and reinvent herself temporarily as a distraction:

*I 'member one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked just like her. Well, almost like. Anyway, I sat in that show with my hair done up in that way and had a good time. I thought I'd see it through to the end again, and I got up to get me some candy. I was sitting back in my seat, and I taken a big bite of that candy, and it pulled a tooth right out of my mouth. I could of cried. I had good teeth, not a rotten one in my head. I don't believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly. (Morrison 1970, p. 121).*

Pauline puts in effort and strives to emulate the style and appearance of Jean Harlow by styling her hair in a similar fashion, adding another instance of Pauline attempting to fit in with other peoples' expectations of her. Her acknowledgement that she did not look like an exact replica, but "almost like" Jean Harlow further substantiates Pauline's awareness of the cultural and physical differences between her and other white people and how that affects her on a deeper level. For a brief moment she felt content with her near-identical styling, but it is however short-lived once she lost her tooth in the theater. The incident in the theater turned out to be devastating to her perception of herself. Most notably, Pauline states that she let her hair go back to its natural state and plaited it and "settled down to just being ugly". Through Pauline equating natural black hair and plaited hair with ugliness, she reveals another sign of internalized racism by equating traditionally African American features with unattractiveness.

Referring to Claudia's narration, she labeled Pauline's frequent trips to the picture show as "education" (p. 120). The phrasing here is significant because it draws parallels to intercultural competence and the ideals of the Norwegian curriculum. Norwegian schools function as a place where the students are learning life skills relevant to the present as well as the future. Schools should be an arena in which teenagers are allowed to grow into

adulthood, and curate and expand their horizon in terms of their attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In the case of Pauline, the input she received from the silver screen had impacted her to the extent that she would use the movies as a reference tool to evaluate the appearance of the people she met. At the bottom of the scale were “the darkened woods” (p. 120), referring to people of color which further indicates whiteness of the highest range. She was unable, in Claudia’s words, to not assign people’s faces on a scale of beauty that she had learned after frequent trips to the theater. This inability reflects a result of her education which negatively influenced aspects of intercultural competence, for instance, her respect of otherness and her willingness to question her assumptions and previous “knowledge” about other cultures as well as her own. By referring to watching movies at the cinema as education, the narration implicitly highlights the impact of what we do in our leisure time has on our view of the self and the world. Additionally, this segment highlights the importance of incorporating the arts into the classroom where students can critically discuss metaphors, messages, and content. Depictions of what is desirable in a woman in terms of appearance and dialect in popular media in 1940’s Lorain favors typically white features such as light skin and straight hair. Ultimately, the novel demonstrates how destructive popular culture was to Pauline and other black women on what is preferable for women. Pauline and her peers’ skills and attitudes were affected to the point where intercultural communication became inefficient across social groups as well as within the African American community.

Pecola’s relationship with her father, Cholly, is another central interpersonal connection of the novel that had a significant impact on Pecola’s destructive impression of herself. Similar to his wife Pauline, Cholly had devastating experiences with other men of both the same and differing races. At the funeral of his great aunt Jimmy, who rescued him at four days old after his biological mother abandoned him to die, Cholly met a girl named Darlene (p. 143). Cholly and his cousin Jake start throwing grapes and chasing Darlene and another girl named Suky, which at one point led to Cholly and Darlene running away from the other two and they fall on top of each other. For a while the tone was playful, and they start having sex in the field but were eventually interrupted by two white men (p. 145). As Cholly and Darlene attempt to quickly get dressed, the white men demand that Cholly finishes the act while saying racial slurs directed at him. As a result, Cholly simulated the act while Darlene covered her face from embarrassment (p. 146). In this scene, the white men

are aware of their power over Cholly and Darlene, but they use their status as a tool to embarrass the couple for their own entertainment. Therefore, this scene illustrates how malpractice of intercultural knowledge can have a devastating impact on minorities

This incident was a pivotal moment for Cholly's further character development as a man and as a father. A natural response for anyone in a similar situation would be to direct anger at the white men, since their arrival changed the tone of the setting from a pleasurable to an embarrassing moment in his life. However, Cholly knows any physical or verbal reaction towards the white men could result in serious harm on his part and in the worst case he could be killed. Instead, he directs his anger towards Darlene: "He hated her. He almost wished he could do it – hard, long, and painfully, he hated her so much. The flashlight wormed its way into his guts and turned the sweet taste of muscadine into rotten fetid bile" (Morrison 1970, p. 146). Cholly knew that the alternative would be to suppress his anger inside of him, as Claudia narrates how "hating [the white men] would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke" (p. 149). Cholly's alternative was to direct his anger towards his impotence, which Cholly interprets as damage related to his manhood of which he directs the blame to black women. From this point, the "question mark of smoke" represents the question of what it means to be a black man in a segregated society. As mentioned, Cholly was abandoned by his mother and his father, Samson, meaning Cholly had to grow up without a father figure present in his life. One could argue that Blue Jack functioned as a replacement for Samson; since Cholly clearly expressed love and adoration for Blue's extraordinary achievements as a black man who for instance talked his way out of a lynching (p. 132).

Cholly did however have unfortunate associations with Blue Jack which reveal underlying racist attitudes toward his own race as well as his assumptions about manhood and fatherhood. For instance, he deduced that Blue Jack could not be like God, because:

God was an old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad. It must be the devil who looked like [Blue Jack] - holding the world in his hands, ready to dash it into the ground and spill the red guts so [n-\*\*\*\*\*] could eat the sweet, warm insides. If the devil looked like that, Cholly preferred him. He never felt anything

thinking about God, but just the idea of the devil excited him. (Morrison 1970, p. 132).

With the assumption that Blue Jack functioned as a father figure for Cholly, then the depiction in the quote above communicates Cholly's negative associations with black men. Similar to Pauline, the lack of black representation in sources that are meaningful to Cholly have influenced him into assuming the worst of people of color. In the quote above, Cholly's consistent input of depictions of God being an old white man had led him to the assumption that the opposite of God, the devil, had to be black. In this sense, Cholly lacked the ability to cease his assumptions of people based on their race. Once again, the novel emphasizes the importance of quality and diversity in popular sources of art such as films and art and how a constant stream of the same type of input can influence people in the long term.

The analysis of the characters in *The Bluest Eye* has demonstrated several good examples of how social conditions after hundreds of years of slavery and during segregation have influenced the African American population's perception of themselves in a negative direction. It is relationship in which white people produce popular content which favors their own race and paints the black population in a negative light or excludes black representations entirely. Pauline and Cholly's history and experiences in their environment provide nuance to the audience. Instead of portraying the parental figures as pure villains, *The Bluest Eye* illustrates good and evil as a complex relationship. While other fictional narratives could portray a villainous character as inherently evil, Morrison provides complex backstories to Cholly and Pauline. As a result, the readers' capacity for empathy is expanded because Morrison humanizes her villains in *The Bluest Eye* instead of only highlighting their harmful actions towards Pecola. This should however not be interpreted as a way of condoning Cholly and Pauline's abuse and harmful behavior in real life. Instead, their stories should be interpreted as Morrison's depicting how social hierarchy and racial tensions in society contribute to shaping an individual's life. *The Bluest Eye* ultimately helps readers experience *how* Cholly and Pauline developed into villainous characters instead of inherently being evil. By writing her characters with this approach, Morrison also communicates to her audience that Pecola's abuse could have been prevented. Morrison's message can then inspire her audience to apply this nuance when interacting with people in real-life intercultural encounters. In all, the novel emphasizes the importance of attributes like

tolerance of ambiguity, cultural sensitivity, empathy, and cultural representation to create harmonious relationships on an individual and societal level.

### **5.3 Intercultural competence in “Recitatif”**

#### **5.3.1 Twyla and Roberta**

“Recitatif” portrays a friendship between two little girls of different races who meet for the first time in an orphanage, in which the audience is left unaware of which one of the two who identifies as black or white. The analysis that follows has three main objectives that pertain to intercultural competence. First, by narrating with an ambiguous approach Morrison prompts the reader to challenge their perceptions of racial stereotypes, which is highly relevant for developing intercultural competence. The second objective focuses on the dynamic relationship between Twyla and Roberta and how their attitudes and tolerance towards each other change each time they reunite which ultimately impacts their communication skills based on racial and cultural differences. Therefore, by examining Twyla and Roberta’s relationship over time this section will emphasize that intercultural competence is a dynamic concept that needs to be consistently maintained and challenged. Finally, through Twyla and Roberta’s differing memory of Maggie’s race and what caused her to fall from the second floor, one can argue that Maggie symbolizes how memories of history and race can affect intercultural relationships and communication.

The short story reflects the significance of primary and secondary socialization as sources for intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills. When Roberta and Twyla first meet, their initial disapproval of each other based on racial differences is established early in the story. First, through Twyla’s immediate thought when greeting Roberta in the orphanage: “It was one thing to be taken out of your own bed early in the morning – it was something else to be stuck in a strange place with a girl from a whole other race” (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1403). From this initial meeting the readers learn that Twyla has some prejudices against Roberta based on her race, which is enhanced by the language Twyla uses in the quote above. By saying that she felt “stuck” with Roberta because of the way she looked, Twyla signals her discomfort with sharing a room in St. Bonny’s with Roberta.

Similar to the learned attitudes that are passed from parents to children in *The Bluest Eye*, it becomes apparent that Twyla’s attitudes towards Roberta’s race are learned attitudes

through her family. For example, Twyla remembers her mother's lessons that involved how "[the other race] never washed their hair and smelled funny. Roberta sure did. Smell funny I mean." (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1403). Furthermore, when Twyla and Roberta are introduced to each other by the Big Bozo Twyla tells Roberta that her mother would not like Twyla to be put together with a girl of Roberta's race. This initial interaction further emphasizes the significance of primary socialization, which is described as a part of life that is "the fundament for personality development and for learning later in life" (Schiefloe 2019, p. 299, *my translation*). In the instance of Twyla and her dancing mother, one can observe how Twyla's mother had passed down racial stereotypes to her daughter about hygiene. Therefore, Twyla's socialization relates back to the knowledge, and consequently the attitude and skills dimensions of intercultural competence. Both primary and secondary socialization can have a strong impact on an individual's knowledge and assumptions of one's own culture as well as other social groups. Instead of questioning her assumed knowledge about Roberta's social group, Twyla reveals a confirmation bias in which she searches for traits in Roberta that confirms learned prejudice from her mother. Eventually Twyla learned to accept Roberta and formed a friendship with her during their time at St. Bonny's, which in turn demonstrates the impact of secondary socialization. In a modern context, secondary socialization would normally be of formal character through education. In the instance of Twyla and Roberta one can however advocate for informal secondary socialization since exposure over time to "a whole different race" proved that racial differences are not a limiting factor for forming positive relationships. Thus, the short story illustrates how both formal and informal secondary socialization can both affect intercultural competence in both a positive and negative direction based on the social context.

Although the girls left on good terms when Roberta eventually left the orphanage, their second encounter demonstrates the fluidity of one's intercultural competence based on cultural shifts. Eight years after the orphanage, Twyla works in Howard Johnson's diner when Roberta and her two friends sit down to eat. Twyla, believing they parted ways on good terms as children approach Roberta and her friends in their booth and attempts to initiate a conversation with them. Despite her efforts she is met with a cold shoulder. During this interaction it becomes clear that Roberta's rejection of her old friend was rooted in their racial and cultural differences of the time. The scene is set in the late 50s or early 60s, a period where youth culture was characterized by rebellious expressions through make-up,

clothing, and psychedelic rock musicians such as Jimi Hendrix. Twyla comments on Roberta's outfit, saying that "she made the big girls look like nuns" (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1407) which diverges significantly from the Christian upbringing of her religious mother. Twyla, on the other end, who had created a stable, ordinary, and sensible life, cannot relate to the rebellious culture that Roberta immersed herself into. Nevertheless, Twyla exhibits openness and curiosity when she learns that Roberta and her friends are on their way to a meeting with Jimi Hendrix, despite not being entirely sure of who that person is. Instead of Roberta reciprocating the same openness she answers with hostility, calling Twyla an "asshole" for not knowing Hendrix was the most prominent rock artist of the time (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1408). Their interaction demonstrates how Roberta's differing level of effective attitudes from Twyla create poor communication skills, and their interactions later in life reflects the importance of continuous development and maintaining intercultural competence.

In their third encounter 12 years later, Roberta eventually explains that her animosity stemmed from their racial differences. After sitting for coffee and reminiscing about their childhood Twyla finally confronts Roberta about their previous encounter at the Howard Johnson's. Roberta replies "Oh Twyla, you know how it was in those days: black – white. You know how everything was" (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1411). This section emphasizes their contrasting perception of the dynamic between black and white people in America. While Roberta literally perceived the world as black and white, Twyla did not share the same impression: "Busloads of blacks and whites came into Howard Johnson's together. They roamed together then: students, musicians, lovers, protesters.» (p. 1411). Here, Morrison reflects racial tensions of the time without revealing which one of the women are black and which one is white. Additionally, their third encounter demonstrates how socioeconomic position can affect the characters' differing opinions of racial mixing during the '60s. While Roberta, who has been depicted as a person of wealth with "diamonds on her hand" and purchasing "cartons of fancy water" (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1409), Twyla narrates her worry about her Klondike bars melting and how they were an unnecessary purchase for spending her husband's salary "foolishly" (p. 1409). Furthermore, Roberta flaunts her wealth to Twyla with her personal limousine chauffeur and two servants while Twyla herself drives a station wagon. Based on the social context of the time in which racial segregation caused major disadvantages for the black population's ability to socially mobilize upwards in socio-

economic status, one can assume based on the clues in their third encounter that Twyla is the minority character.

Likewise, Twyla expresses information about Roberta's hygiene can be both misleading and reveal underlying stereotypical assumptions about race in the audience. As a reader, one might assume that Roberta is black due to the stereotype that black people do not wash their hair or bodies. The incident also hints at the stereotype that dictates straight, "white" hair as "good" hair and African American hairstyles as "bad", "dirty", or "unprofessional". Several sociologists have discussed these stereotypes thoroughly, such as Bartlett (1999), who examined policies on hygiene and race in the 1950s. Through her analysis, she found that the narratives communicated that the white, "clean" women's duty was to teach the black, "dirty" women about cleanliness. These narratives of black equating to inherently dirty and white as inherently clean may reinforce the readers' assumptions of Roberta and Twyla's race based on the reproduction of stereotypes. By introducing these polarities early in the story, Morrison compels the audience to reconsider their knowledge and attitudes regarding racial stereotypes.

Although Roberta and Twyla's friendship started on a bad note, they eventually grew to accept and tolerate each other by finding common ground that extends beyond their physical and cultural differences. Twyla and Roberta were the only girls in the orphanage with mothers still alive compared to the other children with "beautiful dead parents in the sky" (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1405). Twyla was able to dismiss her prejudice related to Roberta's hair and helped her curl her hair despite initially being skeptical of Roberta's hygiene. Additionally, where other people would pass judgment on Roberta for wearing wet socks on a special occasion when their mothers came to visit, Twyla dismisses any assumptions. Instead, Twyla focuses on the beauty of Roberta's socks (p. 1405). Twyla's shift from focusing on previously learned assumptions about Roberta's race related to hygiene to accepting her for how she is, displays how effective communication can cause positive relationships to grow. Moreover, Twyla's developing acceptance for Roberta is illustrated in the scene in which Roberta and Twyla's mothers meet each other for the first time (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1406). Roberta's mother discreetly attempted to walk out of the line to avoid shaking Twyla's mother Mary's hand, presumably because of the racial segregation laws that still were in place in 1950s America. Mary takes offense to this action and proceeds to yell names at Roberta's mother. Again, this action can argue for both sides



regarding Roberta and Twyla's races. In a scenario where Roberta and her mother are black, one could assume that her mother did not want to cause an awkward scene. On the other hand, one can also draw the conclusion that Roberta and her mother are white and did not want to shake Mary's hand based on discriminatory judgments. There are, like the rest of the clues in the short story, no clear answers to the question of racial and cultural affiliations between Roberta and Twyla. Ultimately, Twyla exhibits the ability to set aside the learned prejudice she was socialized into by stopping Mary from continuing her inappropriate behavior in the church.

As the analysis has discussed so far there are several clues in "Recitatif" that hints at Twyla and Roberta's race. However, Stuenkel (2020) emphasizes that there are several interpretations that can be made, and they may vary based on the readers' background. For instance, Stuenkel demonstrates her initial interpretations of Twyla and Roberta's race and class which, like the interpretations made so far in this analysis, assumed Twyla as black and Roberta as white. Other literary critics mentioned in Stuenkel's article, such as Elizabeth Abel (1993) have expressed the opposite opinion. From this perspective, Twyla can be interpreted as the white character because Twyla is jealous of Roberta's achievements and feels like she deserves to be in Roberta's socio-economic position. Twyla's sense of inadequateness in the grocery store can thus be argued that it was rooted in feeling inferior despite the fact that the American social context privileges the white population. Additionally, the attitudes Twyla exhibits in the grocery store scene can be further evidence of coming from a white perspective. One factor that may impact readers' interpretations of race and class is one's own racial affiliations, meaning that white readers interpret Twyla as white while black readers tend to interpret Twyla as black, which is argued by feminist writer Elizabeth Abel (1993, p. 471). Abel's argument indicates that when given the option, readers of the racially ambiguous "Recitatif" have a tendency to assume a narrative that "mirrors" themselves. In terms of intercultural competence, this effect can be a result of seeking what is familiar and comfortable to avoid discomfort. However, insight into characters' experiences through the literary "window" can especially be insightful for readers that have not personally experienced harmful judgements based on their race. By illuminating the multiple interpretations about race and culture one can make from reading Morrison's short story, the audience is simultaneously confronted with their own attitudes and assumed knowledge about themselves and others.

Maggie's race, the disabled and presumably mute kitchen worker at St. Bonny's, became a recurring, central topic of conversation their encounters and serves a distinctive function as a symbol for contrasting memories of racial tensions in the United States. Through the memory of Twyla, the audience is initially informed that Maggie had "sandy-colored" skin, insinuating Maggie being white or of mixed race (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1404). In the same passage Twyla recollects that Maggie fell from the second floor and down into the orchard by accident. However, in the third encounter Roberta insists that the gar girls had intentionally pushed Maggie and that Twyla had repressed her memory of it happening (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1411). Roberta's recollection of her memory leaves a strong impression on Twyla, who had up until this point in their encounter been friendly towards Roberta. Twyla's attitude while attempting to change the topic of conversation immediately changed: "I tried to make my voice sound friendlier than I felt" (Morrison 1983/2013, p. 1411). In their fourth encounter at the protest, Roberta remembered Maggie's race differently, convinced that she was black, and Twyla had indeed pushed and kicked Maggie in the orchard (p. 1413).

Common for all their arguments regarding Maggie is that they are not open to hearing each other's versions with the intent of reaching common ground or agreeing to disagree. Their disputes eventually lead to ineffective conversations between each other in which they change the topic before resolving the issue like in the third encounter. Their opposing memories of Maggie's fall illustrate the ineffectiveness of centering on your perspective of tensions between groups of people in a society. Twyla and Roberta's contrasting perceptions of culture and race during the segregation period and the Civil Rights movement were a result of them not decentering from their point of view. In each encounter, Roberta and Twyla are fixated on their own memories of how Maggie's story played out in the orphanage, of her race, and whether they participated in beating Maggie in the orchard. Maggie's symbolism displays Morrison's commentary on the importance of healthy and productive discussions of historical events to achieve harmonious intercultural relationships. Thus, Maggie functions as a symbol for how differently black and white people perceived the era of American history in which the Jim Crow laws were in place and the following Civil Rights movement.

#### 5.4 Didactical approaches to *The Bluest Eye* and “Recitatif”

Now that both texts have been analyzed, one can consider practical approaches for EFL teachers to transfer the intercultural competence components from the texts and into the classroom. When assigning a whole novel or a short story and planning the classes around fictional texts the only limiting factor is creativity. In other words, the possibilities are endless, and this chapter should not be considered an exhaustive list of activities. The discussion of didactical approaches to Morrison’s texts should be regarded as a selection of possible strategies to appropriately challenge the students. The suggestions for ways of incorporating *The Bluest Eye* and “Recitatif” in upper secondary school will be based on a selection of competence aims of LK20 (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022):

- I) Read, discuss and reflect on the content and language features and literary devices in various types of texts, including self-chosen texts.
- II) Read, analyze and interpret fictional texts in English.
- III) Discuss and reflect on form, content and language features and literary devices in different cultural forms of expression from different media in the English-language world, including music, film and gaming.

With the reform of LK20, having open competence aims like the ones above, the teachers essentially have an open playing field in terms of incorporating literature in their lesson planning. Simultaneously, the reform requires teachers to conduct careful didactical considerations before implementing texts like *The Bluest Eye* and “Recitatif”. Thus, this final chapter will conclude with a discussion that problematizes assessment of intercultural competence, as well as how one deals with responses of discomfort from reading controversial content.

The length and differing complexity in language and content in the text selection are not arbitrary; these qualities can help determine appropriate points in the school term to introduce their students to these texts. “Recitatif” can be a relevant text to introduce, for instance early in the term or in a teacher’s recently assigned class where the teacher has yet to form relationships with their students and gain knowledge about their reading comprehension skills. Morrison’s novel on the other hand, considering its literary complexity and emotionally heavy depictions of abuse and neglect, would be more reasonable to

introduce to a class the teacher has formed a relationship to. According to Nordahl, there are several benefits of having positive relationships and trust between teachers and students when it comes to learning outcomes (2014, p. 133). Students become more motivated, disciplined, and willing to cooperate with their teachers as well as their peers, which in turn creates a positive learning environment. Having such stable relationships with students is in other words crucial for teaching literary complex fiction in terms of form and content.

Since *The Bluest Eye* is a more demanding literary text to work with compared to “Recitatif”, then it would be reasonable to introduce the novel later in the school year. As established in the justification of the text selection, *The Bluest Eye* distinguishes itself from “Recitatif” through its length, explicit violence, and literary complexity. Therefore, the novel should primarily be assigned to upper secondary school students. This does however not exclude all possibility for *The Bluest Eye* being incorporated in the lower secondary school level – variables such as students’ individual emotional maturity and literacy can influence the teacher’s inclination to assign this novel to their student(s). Similarly, in a VG1, VG2, or VG3 English class, a teacher has no guarantee that all students are at the same literacy level and maturity. Therefore, the suggestions of didactical approaches to *The Bluest Eye* will consider how teachers may utilize the entire novel for the entire class as well as how shorter excerpts of the novel can be effective in terms of intercultural competence.

Early in the analysis it was established through studies such as the one conducted by Decoursey & Banerjee (2021) that critical in-depth discussions on literary devices such as metaphors can contribute to long-lasting change in readers’ attitudes. Furthermore, the analysis found that omitting critical discussion surrounding controversial themes can contribute to reproduction of prejudice and stereotypes that can negatively influence intercultural communication. As a thought experiment, one could expect similar outcomes from readers of *The Bluest Eye*. For instance, readers may be left with the impression of African American males as sexually violent and African American women as abusive, neglectful, and superficial. Similar pitfalls can be expected from interpretations of “Recitatif”, which is also dependent on readers’ interpretations of Twyla and Roberta’s race. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate possible ways that teachers can aid in interrupting reproduction of stereotypes.

To develop intercultural competence, one needs to genuinely express curiosity towards other ways of living than your own and decenter. In teaching contexts, there are several activities one can utilize that prompt the students to assimilate into Morrison's characters' story that extends beyond "just" reading her fiction. When working with Morrison's short story for example, the teacher can instruct their class to use their imagination to expand on "Recitatif". Writing a 6<sup>th</sup> encounter between Twyla and Roberta could be an example of this – what is the social context during their encounter, and how does it impact Twyla and Roberta's relationship with each other? Additionally, students could write a given scene from Roberta's point of view and present to each other in small groups – how does Roberta express her attitudes toward Twyla? This way, the students' interpretations of Roberta's opinions and emotions related to race, class, and culture can surface through creative writing. Similar strategies related to creative writing can be applied to *The Bluest Eye*, where there are several interesting characters to take into consideration. How do the students imagine Pauline reacted and felt regarding Cholly's assault and Pecola's pregnancy? What were Pauline's thought processes during the incident with the children in her employer's house? By encouraging the students to imagine scenes from other perspectives the students can access underlying assumptions and attitudes surrounding race and culture that they might not have been aware of that they had. Additionally, in small or larger groups, student presentations of their own creative writing in this context can provoke interesting and insightful conversations about race. By finishing these exercises with open discussions where students are invited to reflect on literary texts and has the potential to facilitate critical thinking and reflection on cultures.

Similarly, Morrison's fiction can also be applicable when working with writing critical, argumentative texts. In this context it can be effective to focus on the literary devices of *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif", for instance Claudia's doll metaphor. With such writing exercises the students are invited to practice their ability to reflect on cause and effect related to cultural and racial injustices. Claudia's doll metaphor can for instance evoke discussions on how popular culture affects our perceptions of ourselves and other cultures. In terms of developing students' skills of relating, one prompt that relates to Pauline's experiences in the cinema could be to ask students to reflect on whether they could sympathize with Pauline's experiences. It is however important to note that prompts presented in this paragraph are suggestions. When working with literary analysis it is of both teachers' and

students' interest to give the class freedom of choice of topic to maintain students' agency and motivation.

However, one must consider how teachers should conduct assessments of their students' intercultural competence. This aspect of intercultural learning can be a complicated task to fulfill. In many ways, students' degree of intercultural competence reveals aspects of their character. As Dypedahl & Bøhn asserts, measuring students' attitudes or capacity for empathy with a grade on a scale, ultimately impacting their opportunities for higher education is controversial (2018, p. 172). Therefore, it is important to distinguish between different types of assessment, such as formative and summative assessment (Kristiansen & Eggen 2014, p. 84). The latter form of assessment is final and summarizes the students' competence for a longer period of time. Manifestations of summative assessment can for instance be students' final grade each term, and functions as controlling for what the student has learned compared to what they should have learned to a certain point. Formative assessment on the other hand, focuses on the improvement of learning. This type of assessment can manifest through oral feedback from teachers and peers, as well as self-assessment. In other words, formative assessment is of informal character while the summative is more formal. In the context of intercultural competence which demands people to continue challenging their beliefs and therefore no clear summative end, it is sensible to employ formative ways of assessing students. However, concrete examples of formative assessment of students' intercultural competence that have been tried and documented, have proven difficult to find. Ultimately, strategies for assessment of intercultural competence is an underdeveloped area that needs attention for future research.

Before concluding, this thesis will consider what may be cause for major hesitation in implementing Morrison's fiction into English classes which pertains to working with controversial themes. This issue relates especially to *The Bluest Eye* of this thesis's text selection, of which contains explicit scenes of abuse, neglect, incest, childhood pregnancy, prostitution, and racism. Likewise, in "Recitatif" contains themes such as racism and neglect. Teenagers who read literature containing controversial topics, who are already in a vulnerable period of their life, can experience reading *The Bluest Eye* as triggering, uncomfortable, or upsetting. From a teacher's perspective these themes might be difficult to teach as well, as one might not for instance feel competent enough on teaching

controversial subjects. Morrison was unafraid to depict controversial themes explicitly where other authors might require readers to retrieve the same information by reading between the lines. One does not have to question that Pecola was raped and impregnated by her father. Likewise, one does not have to read between the lines that Twyla and Roberta were abandoned by their mothers and that they had racist attitudes towards each other. Both texts by Morrison require an understanding of the students as individuals and positive teacher-student relationships, as well as an understanding of the classroom dynamic. These factors should however not be interpreted as discouragement – uncomfortable feelings that arise from in-depth discussions of controversial topics should be regarded as a resource for fostering intercultural competence. Uncomfortable feelings that may arise from reading Morrison’s fiction relate back to “the pedagogy of discomfort” which has had a great influence on intercultural competence (Røthing 2020, p. 59). It is argued that evoking feelings of discomfort can provide a basis for developing critical-thinking skills, self-evaluation, and inclusive education. By facing feelings of discomfort such as anger, sadness, or fear one gets more in touch with their own thought processes and perceptions of controversial topics.

## 6 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate how Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and "Recitatif" can facilitate for the development of intercultural competence to achieve the core values presented in *Kunnskapsløftet 2020* within the context of EFL classrooms in Norwegian upper secondary schools. I hypothesized that Morrison's fictional narratives can be beneficial in terms of challenging students' development of intercultural competence. With the character analysis considering intercultural competence, and didactical discussion, the thesis provides an opening into how teachers might use Morrison's texts and similar texts in their teaching practice. First, the thesis provided context in the introduction, stating that literature has gradually lost recognition in Norwegian classrooms. It is indicated that literature's decreasing significance in English classes is a result of inconsistencies between the high level of instruction in teacher training studies and the teaching that is expected in practice once their education is finished.

Following the introduction, the thesis investigated the role of literature culture in expired curricula, as well as investigating examples of how foreign cultures were presented in previous textbooks. The investigation revealed that fiction had a strong role in previous national curricula in comparison to the current LK20, which manifested chiefly through the emphasis on specific works of fiction that the students should work with. However, previous curricula's emphasis on familiarity with certain works of fiction seemed to have been motivated by other principles than intercultural competence. Principles related to for instance literacy and familiarity with canonical work had a stronger impact on the text selection in previous curricula rather than the cultural content. The lack of focus on teaching exercises that challenges attitudes and knowledge in schools were reflected through racist characterizations of foreign cultures in Norwegian textbooks. Furthermore, literature in the LK20 reform has a more modest role compared to previous curricula through comprehensive and vaguely articulated competence aims and the framework for the five basic skills. The chapter argued that these developments should not be interpreted as devaluing literature, but as encouraging teachers to expand their literary horizon.

Chapter four aimed to illuminate central issues surrounding intercultural competence and how misunderstandings of the term can lead to education policies that might have had good intent, but instead can deprive students of learning central abilities needed for being



democratic citizens. This discussion highlighted parts of my argument that stated that teacher training education needs a more precise definition so that transferring those ideas into practical techniques is less demanding. I sought after influential contributions in the field, most notably Barret et al. (2013) and Byram (2020). I concluded that there are three main dimensions that constitute intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge, and skills. These dimensions are interlinked and dependent on each other. I used the three dimensions to draw parallels to core values, interdisciplinary topics, and competence aims in *Kunnskapsløftet 2020*. By doing so, the thesis established that although the term “intercultural competence” is not explicitly mentioned in the curriculum, its ideals are conceptually aligned with those of Barret et al. and Byram. Finally, the fourth chapter argued that implementing literature can be an effective strategy to develop students’ intercultural competence. By doing so, students can transport emotionally into new perspectives, which prevents the risk of emotional numbing from strictly memorizing facts and numbers about racial injustices throughout history.

My analysis was initiated by providing examples of how intercultural components such as attitudes might have long-term effects on readers’ perspectives, in which I discussed two studies. The discussion of these studies concluded that the main factor that can impact students’ intercultural learning outcomes depends on how closely one works with a piece of literature. This discussion further supports my argument that literature should regain its significance in the classroom by working with texts extensively through critical discussions of content. The character analysis of the thesis focused on investigating the intercultural relationships between the characters of “Recitatif” and *The Bluest Eye*. It sought how social contexts can influence intercultural communication on an individual level. Both plots of *The Bluest Eye* and “Recitatif” are played out during times of racial tension because of racist policies like segregation in America. The analysis found that Pauline and Cholly’s internalized racism that stemmed from society’s harmful ideas of beauty and manhood had impaired their attitudes, knowledge, and ultimately their skill when interacting with their daughter Pecola. Similar effects were found by analyzing Claudia and Frieda’s relationships with Pecola. Morrison’s short story illuminated how intercultural competence is a fluid concept that needs to be consistently challenged and developed for effective communication between cultures to occur. Additionally, the ambiguity of race in “Recitatif” illustrated how

the short story could be utilized in EFL classes to challenge students' underlying prejudice and stereotypes related to race.

Finally, the thesis addressed possible didactical approaches one might adopt when implementing Morrison's fiction into the Norwegian EFL classrooms. Activities related to creative and argumentative writing have been argued to challenge students by prompting them to consider Morrison's novel from multiple perspectives. The importance of discussion has also been emphasized because it is an activity in which ideas of culture and race can surface and consequently be challenged. There are however two central obstacles that might have caused hesitation among teachers to focus extensively on Morrison's fiction and intercultural competence. First, the issue of assessment can cause trouble because a student's intercultural skills, attitudes, and knowledge are highly linked to the content of their character. Additionally, Morrison's fiction, most notably *The Bluest Eye* of the text selection, depicts actions that can be highly disturbing for students to read and for teachers to teach. There are many factors to take into consideration, such as teacher-student dynamics and relationships between students. Positive learning environments are a prerequisite for discussing controversial topics.

The field of intercultural competence and literature's contribution to developing students' attitudes and knowledge, and how these attributes can be applied in skillful intercultural encounters later in life is still a narrow area of research. The literary research made in conjunction with this thesis has demonstrated that there is a need for evidence-based approaches to developing intercultural competence through teaching literature. Especially in the transition from LK06 to the ambitious LK20, future and current teachers need to explore their creative abilities when working with literature's potential. Simultaneously the research field needs to be expanded. Hopefully, this thesis has inspired its audience to contribute to the conversation as well.



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