



UiT Norges arktiske universitet

Faculty of Humanities, Social Studies, and Education

## **Developing intercultural competence and critical thinking skills through young adult fiction**

How Margaret Balderson's *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* has the potential to cultivate intercultural competence, enhance critical thinking abilities, and foster identification among adolescents

Frida Skive Skjevik

Mastergradsoppgave i engelsk litteratur ved lektorutdanningen trinn 8-13 ENG-3983. May 2023



## Abstract

This thesis aims to answer how Margaret Balderson's *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* has the potential to cultivate intercultural competence, enhance critical thinking abilities, and foster identification among adolescents. The process of identification within literature plays a pivotal role in shaping one's identity, which, in turn, holds significant importance in relation to intercultural competence. Expanding upon the principles of deep reading, reflection, and identification, this thesis aims to demonstrate how works of fiction that address cultural minorities and identities on the margins highlight the critical significance of intercultural competence. By delving into these narratives, this thesis discerns the profound role intercultural understanding plays in fostering empathy, dismantling stereotypes, and nurturing a more inclusive society. This thesis will also explore how intercultural competence and abilities such as empathy and critical thinking overlap. The characters in *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* serve as conduits for fostering critical thinking and empathy among adolescent readers, and the narrative presents a thought-provoking journey that encourages introspection and challenges preconceived ideas that may be worth bringing into the classroom. This thesis by no means represents a definitive or flawless approach to developing intercultural competence or critical thinking skills, its purpose, however, is to offer insights and perspectives that can enrich pedagogical practices regarding the cultivation of intercultural understanding and critical thinking abilities among learners.

# Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor Ruben Moi, for his guidance and feedback on this thesis. Thank you for your patience, and for keeping my spirit up and cheering me on with your calm enthusiasm and optimism.

A heartfelt thank you to all my dearest friends, for cheering me up and cheering me on this spring. Thank you for your support and all the laughs, you will be my forever friends. I want to extend another thank you to all the wonderful people in the class of 2018. I will never forget our lovely gatherings and the good spirit and unity we created in the office space.

Finally, of course, thank you to my dearest family, and my partner, for the care and support you have managed to give me throughout the last five years.

Frida Skive Skjevik

Tromsø, May 2023

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	II
Acknowledgments .....	III
List of abbreviations .....	V
1 Introduction .....	1
2 Methodology .....	4
2.1 Interpretation of Imaginative Works .....	4
3 Theoretical Framework .....	9
3.1 Intercultural competence and its importance .....	9
3.2 The impact of fiction .....	20
4 <i>When Jays Fly to Barbmo</i> .....	22
4.1 Intercultural encounters in the novel .....	22
4.2 Fostering cultural understanding and critical thinking .....	26
4.3 The importance of identification and representation for identity construction .....	31
4.4 Outdated language – the problematic use of “lapp” .....	34
5 Didactical Considerations .....	36
5.1 Facilitating the development of intercultural competence .....	36
5.2 Teaching outside the canon .....	41
6 Conclusion.....	43
7 Works Cited.....	46
8 Appendix .....	50
8.1 Appendix A.....	50

## List of abbreviations

**CoE:** The Council of Europe

**IC:** Intercultural Competence

**LK20:** Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion 2020 (Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020)

**NC:** New Criticism

**UDIR:** The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet)

**YAF:** Young Adult Fiction

# 1 Introduction

In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected and globalized, where interactions that transcend physical and cultural boundaries take place every day, there is a growing recognition of the need for new competences among individuals in this global society. As people engage with diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives, there is a demand for individuals who possess the skills and abilities to navigate and thrive in this complex, intercultural landscape. The changing dynamics of our globalized world demonstrate a need for the development of competences that foster understanding, empathy, adaptability, and effective communication across diverse contexts. By equipping individuals with these new competences, we can better prepare them to engage with and contribute to the complexities and opportunities of our interconnected world.

The mandate of the Norwegian educational system is to develop well-functioning democratic members of society. The purpose and responsibility of the educational system is to equip pupils with the necessary skills to master living together in a culturally diverse society. “For years, intercultural learning has been a staple ingredient of European EFL curricula” (Reichl 107), and there is “a felt urgency – and it touches many aspects of our lives – for education which helps citizens to live together in culturally diverse societies,” (CoE 9). Recent, as well as historical, events show that society need members of society that possess the ability to communicate across cultural divisions and understand other cultures. This capability that allows for individuals to successfully navigate this intercultural landscape is referred to as intercultural competence. The educational system holds a pivotal role in the development of these abilities as it strives to develop interculturally competent members of society. By prioritizing the development of intercultural competence through education, teachers can contribute to fostering of peaceful coexistence among diverse communities.

Given the pressing current events, there is an urgent need for a collaborative endeavor to cultivate the necessary attitudes, skills, and knowledge that foster intercultural competence within the realm of education. It is crucial to prepare future generations for active engagement in an increasingly complex and globally interconnected world. By addressing the root causes of stereotypes, discrimination, racism, and other societal challenges, including those exacerbated by economic hardships, intercultural competence has been proposed as a fundamental solution. Recognized as a key competence for multicultural communities, the CoE 2014 provides an educational rationale and framework for integrating this vital competence (7).

The endorsement of such importance by one of the largest human rights organizations in the world affirms its rightful place in teaching and learning practices.

The acquisition of intercultural competence presents an opportunity to address the most virulent issues in contemporary societies. Prevalent manifestations of prejudice, discrimination, racism, division, and hate speech underscore the urgent need to foster understanding, respect, and tolerance in culturally diverse societies, safeguarding the human rights of individuals from all cultural backgrounds (CoE 2014 9). Cultural differences have historically as well as in the present, fueled conflicts worldwide. Thus, the ability to function and communicate successfully across diverse cultures becomes increasingly vital for future generations. By developing this skill, we can effectively reduce misunderstandings and conflicts arising from cultural differences, while promoting more effective collaboration and communication across cultural boundaries. This notion is supported by The Council of Europe which state that “[t]he ability to understand one another across and beyond all types of cultural barriers is a fundamental and prerequisite for making our diverse democratic societies work” (2014 7).

Literature provides a window into the experiences, thoughts, and emotions of people from different times and places. It plays a crucial role in fostering understanding and appreciation for the multitude of human experiences that exist. Through literature, readers can delve into different cultures, perspectives, and historical contexts, gaining valuable insights into universal themes and profound questions about life. Literature serves as a powerful tool to deepen our comprehension of the world by presenting intricate ideas and perspectives that challenge our preconceived notions and beliefs. Literature also encourages critical thinking by examining and questioning the readers’ own, as well as others,’ assumptions, and beliefs. Engaging with literature offers a unique opportunity for adolescents to identify with diverse characters, which can have valuable benefits in terms of self-reflection and personal growth. It is reasonable to believe that fictional narratives will lend themselves well to the cultivation of intercultural competence.

This thesis is built on the thought that pupils should develop and possess intercultural competence to ensure an inclusive world society of educated and reasonable members of society and that reading fiction can contribute to reaching this ideal in education. By drawing on the shared values and principles of frameworks for intercultural competence, the goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the significance of democracy, critical thinking and intercultural competence in education and training in Norway. Essentially, this thesis seeks to



answer how Margaret Balderson's *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* has the potential to cultivate intercultural competence, enhance critical thinking abilities, and foster identification among adolescents.

*When Jays Fly to Barbmo* is a captivating novel that revolves around the life of Ingeborg, who resides on a secluded island named Draugoy. In this remote setting, she shares her domestic existence with her father, aunt Anne-Sigri, the elderly hired man known as The Wood Troll, and experiences the suffocating darkness of the long winter. As the arrival of spring brings a miraculous transformation each year, marked by the migration of the vibrant Sami population with their adorned attire and joyful laughter, Ingeborg's sense of incompleteness grows stronger. With little information about her mother and her maternal family background, Ingeborg embarks on a profound journey to uncover her identity and heritage, gradually leaving her childhood behind in the backdrop of an occupied Norway.

This thesis comprises five main sections. The Methodology section explores theories of interpretation and their impact on the construction of meaning. The Theoretical Framework section is divided into two subsections, the first focusing on the significance of intercultural competence in society and education and its importance, while the second highlights the influence of fictional narratives on readers and their role in fostering intercultural competence and critical thinking skills. In the fourth section, examples are provided to demonstrate how Balderson's *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* can contribute to the development of intercultural competence and critical thinking skills among adolescents, emphasizing its potential for stimulating fruitful discussions. Finally, the fifth section offers didactic considerations, presenting insights and reflections on the essential elements for cultivating intercultural competence and how teachers can best facilitate for its development.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Interpretation of Imaginative Works

Interpretation of imaginative works is a complex and nuanced process that involves personal and contextual factors. Interpretation of imaginative works such as literature, poetry, and art can vary widely depending on the individual's personal experiences, cultural background, and worldview. People can interpret the same work of literature differently, and there can be multiple interpretations of one single piece of work. Interpretation is a subjective process of gaining a deeper understanding of a given work and its significance and may be influenced by an individual's beliefs, values, emotional state, and prior knowledge. Literary methodology focuses particularly on the interpretation and analysis of a chosen text, and it differs from social and empirical methodology which, on the other hand, concerns the study of social phenomena and empirical data. The interesting aspect of literature entails engaging and finding meaning within a text which requires an understanding of different literary techniques to uncover the complexity of the text in focus. Scholars have presented several theories on how individuals systematically create meaning from a text.

Emphasis on the interaction between the reader and the text is known as the reader-response theory. This theory focuses on the role of the reader when creating meaning from a text, and Louise Rosenblatt stipulated that meaning is created in the interaction between the reader and the text, and meaning is not something that arises, is fixed, or determined by the author. Stanley Fish further emphasizes the special role that interpretive communities have in the shaping of meaning (Faris 1983), which addresses how the reader is constrained by the shared assumptions and conventions of their interpretive community. The most prominent notions of the reader-response theory are significant for educators, as calling attention to an individual's subjective interpretation is of importance in instructional settings. It must be taken into account that younger readers have less knowledge of the canon, hermeneutics, and advanced theory, which stipulates the need for guidance through such cognitive processes as interpretation. The reader-response theory emphasizes the individual's subjective interpretation and response to a text and points to the role that interpretive communities uphold in interpretation. (Selden et al.)

While the reception theory of Rosenblatt and Fish empowers the single pupil's authority over the text, teachers are better served by actually engaging directly with the complexities of

individual texts and some orientation in literary theory. New critics regard literary works as something of themselves and argue that meaning can only be found within the text, not affected by external factors such as historical context or the author's intentions. I. A. Richards highlights in his *Practical Criticism* of 1929 the call for a focus on the basic principles of close reading of poetry, and practical criticism became a central and compulsory critical and pedagogic tool in higher education encouraging attentive close reading of texts on equal terms in the classroom (Selden et al. 11). The New Criticism theory neither concerns historical, ideological, biographical, or intellectual matters of context, it only regards 'the words on the page' or how the text 'speaks itself' and was an equalizing and democratic activity (12). Wimsatt and Beardsley pursue the connection between the 'addresser' (the writer), 'message' (the text), and 'addressee' (the reader) in hopes of an 'objective' criticism disavowing the writer's subjective input and the reader's emotional impact, only concerning the text itself leaving out the question of intention (13). They further coined the term 'intentional fallacy' which concerns the inherent problem of attempting to judge a literary work by assuming the intent of the author. The notion of 'the death of the author' (Beardsley) emerged as a consequence of a profound disregard for the author's intention and presence within the work. Meaning can, according to new critics, only emerge from the text itself through attention to formal constraints, order, and how parts of the text relate through the act of close reading.

New critics put forward that meaning is created in the interaction between various literary elements such as language and form, and the act of close reading constitutes the very foundation of New Criticism. With the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the text and uncovering underlying themes and ideas, the close reading approach involves a detailed analysis of a text by paying attention to language, structure, and meaning. The explicit emphasis of the close reading approach to literature was to promote a conscious reading of texts and to democratize instructed literary studies (Selden et al. 11). Instead of placing thought on the historical context and the author's intentions when reading literature, the text is allowed to speak the tale of the time itself merely through the words on the page. A nuanced and critical approach to close reading, recognizing its limitations, while also realizing its potential value as a tool for understanding and creating meaning of literature may be a good way to move forward.

At the core of New Criticism is an overemphasis on formal aspects at the expense of broader social, historical, and cultural context, which can result in narrow and reductive understandings of a text. By concentrating solely on the text itself and accepting intentional fallacy, close reading might occasionally overlook the broader context in which the text was

written and the author's intended meanings and themes. The limiting rejection of historical analysis by NC, its propensity to present subjective judgments as objective, and its general emphasis on poetry in particular alarmed Aristotelians in particular (Selden et al. 15). Acknowledging and understanding the intentions of an author can provide valuable insights into the interpretation and meaning of a text. The emphasis on authorial intent varies among theories and scholars, however, intentional fallacy remains an important concept within the framework of New Criticism.

Several perspectives and perceived limitations of the New Critical approach depart from formalist principles in favor of a broader approach to criticism. Mark Schorer's notions align fundamentally with the idea that isolating a text from external influences may lead to a narrow understanding. Furthermore, Schorer emphasizes the presence of contradictions and ambiguities within literature, recognizing their essential role in shaping the artistic and intellectual value of a written work (Selden et al. 14). Schorer puts forward that the 'technique' of a novel is its language, and it must be analyzed in those terms. He extends this analysis and further reveals that "...unconscious patterns of imagery and symbolism (way beyond the author's 'intention') present in all forms of fiction..." (14). Selden explains that Schorer "shows how the author's 'meaning,' often contradicting the surface sense, is embedded in the matrix of linguistic analogues which constitute the text." (14). On the other hand, the works of Jacques Derrida inadvertently challenged many of the New Critical assumptions, essentially in relation to the notion of a fixed stable meaning. According to Derrida language is unstable, never fully present, or static, and he challenged the idea of a single, unchanging meaning by attempting to show the underlying instabilities, inconsistencies, and complexity inside texts. Through his deconstruction or analysis of a text, Derrida delves deep into its intrinsic nature, uncovering the points of *différance* that give rise to compelling and thought-provoking interpretations (Leitch et al. 1604). Meaning is, as put forward by Derrida, created from the differences within the text and is always in flux, never fixed or stable which contrasts the New Critic notions.

New Critics enhance the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the text, and this autonomous process may be challenging, especially for younger readers. New criticism rejects the notion of the reader's emotional response or personal feelings about a text as legitimate criteria for analysis, consequently, the reader must consciously avoid subjective emotional reactions in favor of an objective analysis of the text. Interpretation is highly subjective as readers bring their unique background when engaging with a text, consequently, the same text can be interpreted in various ways by different readers. However, achieving an objective

understanding of a work demands a conscious effort to distance oneself from personal emotions which requires an extensive level of self-reflection and heightened consciousness, which younger readers might not fully master as developing such abilities are a part of the lifelong formation process. The presented theories can give the impression that there is only one correct interpretation, a viewpoint that may cause a lack of critical engagement with various perspectives. Furthermore, too much attention to the text itself might fail to recognize the complex ways readers bring their own horizons to a text and their individual level of consciousness.

Acknowledging the criticisms of a limited understanding associated with a formalist approach, it is important to recognize the value of other theoretical perspectives that operate within broader contexts. The hermeneutical perspective on understanding does not separate knower and object, rather it recognized a fusion of the past and the present (Selden et al. 41). Therefore, any present perspective entails a relationship with the past. Heidegger posited that the uniqueness of the human existence lies in our consciousness, which simultaneously *projects* the objects of the world while being *subjected to* the world itself (39). According to Heidegger, an interpreter cannot adopt a position of detached observation; instead, the interpreter is intimately intertwined with the objects of their consciousness, as their thinking is inherently situated and historical, rooted in personal and internal experiences. This rise of theories that highlight the significance of individual consciousness paved the way for the development of hermeneutics and the exploration of ‘horizons of understanding.’

“The concept of ‘horizon’ suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion.” (Gadamer 316).

Gadamer applied Heidegger’s situational approach to literary theory and elaborated on the notion of the ‘horizon of interpretation’ (Selden et al. 39). Meaning is found through analysis and interpretation within one’s horizon, and an individual’s understanding of a text will always be limited by the contents of their own horizon. The horizon consists of the assumptions, experiences, beliefs, and cultural and historical context which the interpreter brings when engaging with a text. “In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices.” (Gadamer 317). Personal biases and assumptions are brought into any interpretation, and those need to be

questioned in order to reach a nuanced and accurate understanding of meaning. The process of questioning one's own horizon and becoming conscious of personal biases is a demanding one, and young readers, in particular, will encounter difficulties in recognizing and acknowledging these internal aspects. Developing an awareness of one's own biases and recognizing the influence of one's cultural background is a complex process that forms an integral part of personal growth, which may not be readily expected from adolescent readers. However, it is only when the reader is conscious of their own horizon that they can open up to alternative interpretations which, in return, can broaden their horizon.

Literary theories provide frameworks for interpretation and pushes scholars and researchers to make advancements within the discipline. It is beneficial, necessary even, that teachers and educators familiarize themselves with theory on interpretation. When engaging with literature teachers often occupy the role as a facilitator, a role that requires a deep understanding of approaches to literature and the impact they have on the final interpretation and analysis. In addition, teachers shall allow students to explore different approaches to interpretation for motivational and educational reasons. Different approaches to interpretation, formalist approach, reader-response, postcolonial, feminist approach, etc., allows readers to explore different viewpoints or 'lenses' for analysis which spark intellectual dialogue and offers alternative interpretations. At last, theories on interpretation prompts reflection on the impact and purpose of literature in society, in relation to artistic expression, the human experience, and for readers on an individual level.

### **3 Theoretical Framework**

This thesis is built on the thought that pupils should develop and possess intercultural competence to ensure an inclusive world society of educated and reasonable members of society and that reading fiction can contribute to reaching this ideal in education. The following sections will be devoted to explaining the concept of intercultural competence and why it is deemed important by governments and councils in Europe and Norway. First, however, this chapter provides definitions of central social concepts, such as culture and identity, which must be in place before addressing the concept of intercultural competence and discussing Balderson's novel. Then, as this thesis contends that intercultural competence can be acquired through fiction, the chapter draws on the methodology chapter and explores the persuasive impact that fiction has by paying attention to elements such as deep reading and in-depth learning. As this thesis focuses on a novel with a Sami narrative, this chapter contains some background on Sami legislation as well. The last part features relevant legislation and pertinent parts of the national curriculum due to the educational scope of this thesis.

#### **3.1 Intercultural competence and its importance**

Norway is one of the founding members of the Council of Europe (CoE) and their 2014 pamphlet "Developing intercultural competence through education" will with its definitions and fundamentals serve as a basis for intercultural competence in this thesis. Henceforth referred to as CoE 2014. The CoE (2014) is the leading human rights organization on the European continent and the organization is dedicated to upholding and protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law for all citizens irrespective of cultural affiliations. The rationale for choosing this pamphlet as a reference point for this thesis is that the core values of the CoE (2014) greatly coincide with the ones stated in the Education Act (Ministry of Education and Research) and the national curriculum by the Norwegian Directory for Education and Training (UDIR). Given the educational scope of this thesis, this alignment enables a comprehensive and coherent exploration of the themes and issues at hand. Furthermore, this section will draw on insights from relevant scholars in the field to provide additional elaboration on the key terms and concepts introduced in the CoE (2014) pamphlet and in Norwegian educational legislation with the aim to provide a comprehensive and well-supported analysis of the concepts and ideas central to the thesis.

An understanding of intercultural competence is dependent on the definition and understanding of a handful of other terms, such as identity, culture, intercultural encounters, and competence, as pointed out by the CoE (2014: 13). The abovementioned terms are all complex, diverse, interconnected, and in flux, and defining them helps to better understand how such factors shape people's perceptions and impact an individual's interaction with others. To ensure clarity in the discussion of intercultural competence it is important to discuss the key terms involved, and examining these terms in depth gives us a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of intercultural interactions and the skills necessary to master such encounters. This investigation provides a foundation for the subsequent discussion of intercultural competence.

According to Merriam-Webster identity is defined as “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual” (“Identity”). However, identity is a complex construct consisting of several dimensions that interact and evolve over time. An individual's identity is constantly shifting, shaping, and divergent due to factors such as context and personal qualities. In the framework on intercultural competence, the CoE (2014) goes beyond a simplistic view of identity as a single construct and instead recognizes the complex and multifaceted nature of identity. Since most people use a range of identities to characterize themselves, the CoE (2014) distinguishes between personal and social identities. Personal identities are shaped by an interplay of elements such as personal attributes, interpersonal relationships, roles, and autobiographical narratives. Personal attributes encompass a wide range of personality traits such as being extroverted, tolerant, or caring. Interpersonal relationships are the connections that individuals have with other people such as friendships, romantic or family relationships, or professional relationships. Roles refer to the positions an individual hold in social groups or organizations, i.e., parent, daughter, teacher, or colleague. Autobiographical narratives are the stories individuals create and communicate about their own lives, drawing on their family background, childhood and adolescence, education, and significant life events. Personal identity encompasses all these elements and reflects the unique combination of personal traits, experiences, and relationships that shape the individual's shape of self. (CoE 2014: 13)

In contrast to personal identities, social identities are constructed based on an individual's membership in social groups, often defined by elements such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, generation, hobbies, interests, etc., as noted by the CoE 2014 (13). Social identities are not determined by individual characteristics but by social structures and historical contexts, as well as by the ways in which these identities intersect and interact. As humans, we rely on



different identities depending on the context in which we are. For example, an individual's gender identity may intersect with their ethnic or religious identity. Another important variety of an individual's social identity is constructed based on their membership in cultural groups, which is what makes up their cultural identity. This kind of identity that relates to the culture one associates oneself with is significant when defining intercultural competence, and a central construct as this thesis concerns Sami and Norwegian culture which will be explored further later on. The different beforementioned identifications help people to construct their individuality and what characterizes them and find their position in relation to other people. (CoE 2014 13)

Based on the previous elaborations I move forward with the following definition of identity in this thesis: identity is the distinguishing personality and character of a person and all the traits, attributes, affiliations, and roles that impact and shape the individual. Further, identity is distinguished into social and personal identities which both characterize people and help them construe their individuality and decide their position in relation to others. Furthermore, identity is "instable, in flux and performative" as stated by Reichl (115).

Culture is a prominent and influential concept on the individual level as well as on the social level in society. However, it is a complex and multifaced concept that is not easy to define, nor easily measured or quantified. The CoE also points to the difficulties of defining culture due to the fact that "cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous groups that embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often contested, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalized ways" (13). Cultural resources are distributed to an entire group, however only a subset of the cultural resources available is used by the individual. Further, this thought of culture means that it is possible for communities of any size to have their own unique cultures such as nations, organizations, neighborhoods, etc. All people, therefore, take part in and identify with several cultures simultaneously (14). The young character in *When Jays Fly to Barbmo*, Ingeborg, portrays such complexity through her affiliation to multiple cultures. Just as complex as the notion of identity, culture is also proven complex as one can affiliate with multiple cultures at the same time.

Dypedahl and Lund emphasize that it is easy to think of big C topics like literature, arts, and history, and the cultural phenomena promoted by a country when trying to define culture (16). Small c culture, on the other hand, refers to the values, attitudes, beliefs, norms, and practices people acquire within their society – "the way of life" (Lustig and Koester; 16). The

knowledge and skills culture provides us with help us “play the game of life,” and it is important to become aware of how influential our background is in communication and meetings with other people. Our background and upbringing construct our “perceptual lens” and people understand events and phenomena differently (17). Dypedahl and Lund highlight that within a society there are competing and conflicting values, norms, and practices which make culture anything but static, which echoes the CoE’s notion of culture as heterogeneous and dynamic. A working definition of culture that captures such nuances can be: “the dispositions or tendencies with regard to how members of a group tend to think and behave as a result of socialization” (Dypedahl; 17). Culture is the shared beliefs, values, customs, history, and artifacts that characterize and influence a group or society. It is not something fixed and can be passed on throughout generations and has a significant role in the shaping of an individual and their perception of the world.

Cultural boundaries can be ‘fuzzy’ according to the CoE (14). The substantial variation within a group and who is viewed as a member of the group is decided differently by each individual which makes for ‘fuzzy’ cultural borders. In the same way that identity is constructed in the intersections, cultural affiliations also intersect creating a unique cultural positioning for each individual (14). Cultural affiliation is fluid and dynamic, a notion stated as follows by Reichl: “Recent cultural theory sees culture increasingly in flux, intersecting, constantly changing, and also constituting a web rather than a monolithic whole” (115). The theory has accepted culture as a network rather than a container restricted by boundaries and national demarcations. Culture is complex because of intersecting affiliations and borders, individuals belonging to various cultures, changing internal contestations, and lastly, due to the fact that cultures change over time in equivalence to political, economic, and historical developments.

Individuals have affiliations to various cultures, for example as members of different groups at home and in our leisure time, and we are influenced by each of our memberships or cultures (Dypedahl and Lund 17). The CoE further adds that cultural participation is dependent on the context (15). People use multiple cultural resources to negotiate and construct their own meaning of themselves and the world, which serves both as a resource and a constraint on thoughts and actions (15). In addition to the subjective construction of individual descriptions, cultural identities may be ascribed to a person by other people as well:

“However, cultures also constrain and limit the thoughts and actions of individuals. Cultural affiliations influence not only how people perceive themselves and their own

identities, but also how they perceive others, other groups, and other ways of acting, thinking and feeling, and how they perceive the relationships between groups.” (CoE 2014 15)

Such affiliations as pointed to above may often be dependent on characteristics that are visible, namely gender or ethnicity. These factors may be something that the individual does not attach any significant importance to, but others’ emphasis on these factors can have unfortunate effects on individuals’ social adaption and psychological well-being (CoE 2014 16). Indigenous groups in all corners of the world have been, and still are, victims of unfortunate characterizations based on cultural practices, attributes, and visible features. People’s thoughts can be heavily constrained by their cultural affiliations which can affect others in a negative manner and be a source of conflict. The happiness and well-being of an individual will most likely be heavily affected in a negative way if others ascribe inappropriate identities to them (CoE 2014 16). Hence, culture is understood as a network of material, social, and subjective aspects (14). Different cultures have unique ways of viewing the world, communicating, and interacting with others which can, still is, and has been, a source of conflict and diversity all over the world. It is made apparent by scholars and in research, as presented, that equipping younger generations with the competence to tolerate and understand other cultures and maneuver across cultures is an important way to work to overcome such issues.

I have already established the complexity of identity, culture, and cultural identities which is a presage that intercultural encounters seem to be no less complex. An intercultural encounter can happen both in person and through virtual channels and is defined by the CoE as an interaction with a person or a group who is thought to have a different cultural affinity than oneself (16). It is when cultural differences are recognized and made salient by an individual’s own orientation or the situation that an interpersonal interaction becomes an intercultural encounter (CoE 2014 16). Dypedahl and Lund set forth the term “lenses” to describe the tension that can occur in dialogue due to discrepancies (19). People can interact using different lenses and misconceptions may occur, however, there is also a possibility that people operate using the same lens despite different cultural backgrounds. In the globalized world we live in today such encounters occur between millions of people every day, and for those to run smoothly and to ensure harmony and successful communication intercultural competence is a required skill and relates directly to democratic citizenship.

An acquired skill such as intercultural competence is not easy to measure and evaluate, but before going into that discussion it is needed to establish what competence actually entails. Colloquially competence is a synonym for ability, and in more formal contexts such as education and training it indicates “the ability to meet complex demands within a given context” (CoE 2014 16). The concept of competence, as defined by the CoE, encompasses a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding, and abilities that are applicable to specific situations (16). In other words, competence is not just about having knowledge and skills, but also about possessing the right mindset and approach to effectively apply them in relevant contexts. As of that, this thesis will move forward with the notion that competence is a person’s aptitude to successfully navigate and respond to diverse contexts that present tasks, challenges, or obstacles, whether in collaboration with others or independently.

The goal of fostering intercultural competence is to understand and appreciate cultural differences and to inhabit the skill to navigate and bridge cultural divides. It is essential to foster understanding, respect, and tolerance in all culturally diverse societies (CoE 2014 9), and if fully achieved it is reasonable to hypothesize that intercultural competence can help reduce misunderstandings and conflicts based on cultural differences and facilitate for more effective communication and collaboration across cultural and national borders. Susanne Reichl proposes to use the term ‘transcultural learning’ rather than ‘intercultural learning’ (114). Her rationale for this suggestion is that the term ‘trans’ better reflects the recent developments in cultural theory which is, as previously mentioned, that culture is dynamic and more like a network of relations. However, both terms are found within frameworks that acknowledge culture as dynamic, changing, and interconnected networks (Delanoy 96; Reichl 114). Generally, and as the CoE puts forward, there is a felt urgency for education that prepares citizens for life in a society that is culturally diverse (9).

Essentially, intercultural competence can be described as having knowledge and respect for different cultures and cultural differences, as well as the ability to effectively and successfully communicate and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Holmes and O’Neill’s understanding of intercultural competence is based on Byram’s (1997) description of the term:

“[intercultural competence is understood as] the range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes individuals bring to the intercultural encounter, and their critical cultural awareness (the ability to interpret, evaluate and negotiate, on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives,

practices and products in their own and other cultures, which may lead to some degree of acceptance of new ideas).” (Byram 1997; Holmes and O’Neill 709).

Byram’s definition of intercultural competence encompass a broad spectrum of skills and attitudes that individuals bring into intercultural situations. Dypedahl and Lund operate with the notion that intercultural competence is “the ability to relate constructively to people who have mindsets and/or communication styles that are different from one’s own” (Dypedahl 2019; Dypedahl and Lund 19). Dypedahl offers a narrower definition that focuses solely on the capacity to establish connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of being able to relate to others with other experiences. The skill that Dypedahl focuses on is of importance, however, Byram’s definition considers a range of factors that individuals bring into various situations, making up a ‘toolbox’ to help individuals navigate intercultural encounters. Deardorff’s definition proposes that intercultural competence is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff; 247). This thesis moves forward with Deardorff’s definition whilst also keeping Byram’s understanding of intercultural competence in mind.

Many scholars have put forward both simple and complex definitions of intercultural competence and it has been proven that many of them agree on the essential components of IC. In a study by Deardoff, it was discovered that over 80% of intercultural scholars and administrators were able to reach a consensus on 22 fundamental components of intercultural competence (Deardoff 254). Many of the understandings of IC focused on personal attributes (curiosity, openness, and respect for other cultures), cognitive skills such as comparative thinking skills and cognitive flexibility, along with components of cultural awareness, adaptive traits, and cultural knowledge. An unexpected outcome of the study was the consensus on specific skills, including analytical, interpretive, and relational skills, as well as listening and observational skills (248). Many of these notions overlap, as does the components of the CoE’s considering Michael Byram’s co-authorship on the pamphlet. Hence, the components in the CoE pamphlet are labeled *attitudes*, *knowledge* and *understanding*, *skills* and *actions* (CoE 19-21). However, it is important to note that intercultural competence cannot be seen as something final and ‘correct,’ IC is, as put forward by Reichl, “a gradual process rather than a product at the end of a straightforward process” (116). The five beforementioned components are elaborated on by the CoE in bulleted lists with the intention of being indicative rather than exhaustive (2014 19-21), which can be found, in their entirety, attached as an appendix

(Appendix A). These components will be revisited throughout this thesis, therefore, each of the key elements will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

The component labeled *attitudes* relates to how individuals' approach and interact with other cultures, values, and people from different cultures, and involves valuing cultural diversity and the plurality of views and practices. Central elements to this aspect are showing respect towards individuals with different cultural affiliations, maintaining openness, curiosity, and a willingness to learn from and about people with different cultural backgrounds and perspectives. An individual that has acquired intercultural competence respect people with different cultural orientations than their own and see the value of cultural diversity rather than label it as something strange. An interculturally competent person will also be empathetic and willing to question previously assumed norms tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty. Actively seeking out opportunities for engagement and cooperation with individuals with different cultural backgrounds or perspectives also characterize the interculturally competent individual. (CoE 19)

The knowledge and understanding component revolve around the ability to recognize the internal diversity and heterogeneity present within all cultural groups, and comprehension of language and interaction. The concepts of culture and identity are complex matters as previously established, and becoming aware of this complexity is part of becoming interculturally competent. Another aspect of the knowledge and understanding component involves developing an awareness of how aspects such as beliefs, values, and practices are influenced by one's own cultural affiliation. It also entails recognizing individual preconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices, and the manifestations of discrimination. Further, and interculturally competent individual acknowledges the significance of language in intercultural contexts and how linguistic factors may impact or alter the way ideas are expressed which may cause misinterpretations or an imbalance of power within the interaction. Finally, gaining an understanding of the processes related to different interactions and the construction of knowledge is significant to knowledge and understanding. (CoE 19-20)

The capacity to transcend personal perspectives and embrace other's viewpoints characterize the *skills* and *action* components of IC. These components encompass a wide range of *skills* necessary for achieving intercultural competence. The first part of the *skills* component refer to exploring and interpreting information about other cultures, recognizing their significance. Second, the aspect of cognitive flexibility is highlighted as the ability to adapt and

critically reflect upon one's own, as well as others', cultural beliefs and practices in different situations and contexts. This requires empathy, understanding, and the ability to adjust one's behavior in new environments. Lastly, awareness of the significance of language and proficiency form another important aspect of the *skills* component. This involves acting as a mediator in transcultural situations and being capable of functioning even in cases of communication breakdown. Further, an interculturally competent individual *actively* tries to engage in intercultural situations and encounters. This individual successfully communicates and cooperates within the situation, and also inhabit the ability to challenge attitudes and behaviors. The components of intercultural competence mentioned earlier hold little value unless they are actively applied in real-life situations, as the ultimate goal of intercultural competence is to enhance one's ability to navigate and handle diverse contexts effectively. This set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that the CoE has put forward in these components serve as the foundation for creating global citizens. Proving that developing interculturally competent citizens is a requirement for democratic citizenship in an increasingly culturally diverse world. (CoE 20-21).

Intercultural competence is becoming increasingly more important because people with different cultural backgrounds are more likely to interact now than ever before in areas of education, work, travel, and retail. Interactions across different cultural backgrounds are now an everyday occurrence for many people. Misunderstandings and conflicts that surface based on cultural differences can be reduced by transcultural abilities such as intercultural competence. There are still people in the world that are unable to experience equality of opportunity and that cannot participate fully as democratic members due to socio-economic disadvantages or discrimination that exclude them to the margins of society (CoE 2014 11). By developing global citizens who possess an understanding and tolerance towards individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, and who can navigate intercultural encounters effectively, we, as a society, have the potential to provide more people with opportunities and strive towards eliminating discrimination and exclusion. However, recognizing the significance and emphasizing the value of intercultural competence serves as a means to foster harmony within diverse societies, and it should be given priority by public authorities, as evident in the efforts made by both the CoE and the Norwegian authorities.

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR), Ministry of Education and Research, along with the CoE, accentuate the importance of integrating intercultural competence as a core ideal in education. This focus on IC, as outlined in the new Norwegian

National Curricula (LK20), serves as the fundamental basis for justifying the thesis at hand. “There is a felt urgency – and it touches many aspects of our lives – for education which helps citizens to live together in culturally diverse societies.” (CoE 9). The CoE emphasizes that education that strives to develop and enhance IC plays a vital role in fostering a peaceful coexistence (9), and Reichl states that intercultural learning has been a staple ingredient in the EFL curriculum in Europe (10). In Norway, teachers are expected to adhere to the curriculum, which includes a clear emphasis on intercultural competence as reflected in government-mandated policies. The institution responsible for guiding teachers in Norway is The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training (UDIR). The significance of intercultural competence is highlighted in the new curriculum (Knowledge Promotion of 2020, also known as LK20).

“English is an important subject when it comes to cultural understanding, communication, all-round education and identity development. The subject shall give the pupils the foundation for communicating with others, both locally and globally, regardless of cultural or linguistic background. English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns.” (Ministry of Education and Research)

As evidenced above, it is stated in the English curriculum (ENG-0104) under *relevance and central values* that pupils shall be helped to acquire intercultural competence in the English subject. The significant role that the English subject has in relation to cultural understanding, identity construction and communication is made explicit by The Ministry of Education and Research. The English curriculum is further divided into core elements, interdisciplinary topics, and basic skills. Within the core elements, one sub-category pertains to *working with texts in English* where it is stated that:

“By reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. They shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others’ identities in a multilingual and multicultural context.” (Ministry of Education and Research 2019)



The English subject has a unique opportunity to engage with different texts that can help foster intercultural competence and help with identity development. The purpose of the education states that the pupils shall acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that helps them master their lives and allow them to participate in work-life and in the society (NOU 2015: 8 19, my translation). And in a country such as Norway where the increasingly diverse society is considered to grow even more it is important to accentuate the importance of democratic citizenship (NOU 2015: 8). The core curriculum also includes the interdisciplinary topic *democracy and citizenship*. A topic that aims to provide pupils with knowledge of the core tenets of democracy and its relation to human rights and equip them with the skills to “face challenges in accordance with democratic principles” (Ministry of Education and Research). Applied to the English curriculum, democracy and citizenship points to how pupils are to understand that how they view the world is culture dependent, which can allow for new interpretations, spark curiosity and prevent prejudice (Ministry of Education and Research). Dypedahl and Bøhn argue that democracy and citizenship rest upon the principles of cooperation and tolerance of different mindsets, which are requirements for sustainability both locally and globally (84). Being able to understand, communicate, and adapt within cultural contexts is considered to be one of the necessary skills of the future along with democratic competence (NOU 2014: 7 12).

Another central aspect of the core values of the education and teaching is critical thinking. In the core curriculum critical thinking “means applying reason in an inquisitive and systematic way when working with specific practical challenges, phenomena, expressions and forms of knowledge.” (Ministry of Education and Research). Pupils are to become able to recognize that their own experiences, perspectives, and beliefs may be incomplete or flawed. In addition, they shall be able to scrutinize and criticize new insights using theories, methods, arguments, experiences, and evidence, and evaluate different sources of knowledge. The idea is to encourage individuals to think independently and develop well-reasoned reflections and arguments. However, to think critically is very challenging and demands self awareness. Further, it is challenging to facilitate for such skills due to limitations such as time, resources, level of maturity, etc. Critical thinking is a multifaced skill involving several cognitive processes, and developing such abilities requires practice and guidance over an extended period of time. However, the teaching should strive for a balance between respecting established knowledge and fostering explorative and creative thinking to cultivate new knowledge.

Public authorities have taken action to ensure that citizens inhabit transcultural abilities and knowledge, and intercultural competence is valued as an important skill in Norway with the government placing great emphasis on the development of such competence. It is explicitly stated in the national curriculum that the Norwegian government considers intercultural competence as a significant element in promoting social cohesion and integration. Norway is a culturally diverse society with an immigrant population as well as an indigenous population, that is considered to grow in the following years due to immigration creating an even more culturally diverse Norway.

### **3.2 The impact of fiction**

Fictional narratives can “have a persistent implicit influence on the way we view the world, and that these effects may last longer than the effects of typical explicit attempts to change beliefs by presenting claims and arguments.” (Appel and Richter 129). Fictional narratives possess considerable influence over consumers, reaffirming the persuasive power of fiction and is deemed an important part in the socialization of children, adolescents, and adults (129). Adolescents frequently engage with and identify with fictional narratives across a wide range of mediums, including television, cartoons, books, podcasts, etc. Fictional narratives have the ability to alter and shape the beliefs and assumptions of its readers, making it potentially concerning if a narrative influence them in what is considered to be an unhealthy manner. Appel and Richter highlight the possibility that even a small amount of false information presented in fiction can alter our perception of the world (114). The potential for persuasion arises from readers immersing themselves in the fictional world of the narrative, resulting in a shift in their emotional and cognitive processes and a consequent weakening of mechanisms for critical evaluation (128). This possibility demonstrates the power of fiction and how adolescents are impacted by fictional narratives. Therefore, Appel and Richter establish the fact that “[...] fictional narratives are a powerful educational tool that on the one hand may be used in a planned and reasonable way to change beliefs and behavior concerning existential topics...” (129).

Deep reading can inspire introspection, empathy, and a deeper understanding of oneself and others through fiction. According to Wolf and Barzillai, deep reading is considered to be “the array of sophisticated processes that propel comprehension and that include inferential and

deductive reasoning, analogical skills, critical analysis, reflection, and insight.” (131). It is an immersive and focused approach to reading that emphasizes the reader's active involvement with the text, including interpretation and reflection on its meaning. “Deep reading of literature can promote all aspects of cognition and engagement with text, including emotion, empathy, ethics, knowledge of the world, ideology and social justice issues.” (Bland 72). Deep reading enables readers to thoroughly analyze and comprehend a text, focusing on its themes, underlying messages, and making connections both within the text and beyond. It nurtures critical thinking skills by encouraging readers to question, interpret, and evaluate the text from multiple perspectives, allowing them to form their own interpretations and understandings. Moreover, deep reading has the ability to facilitate emotional connection with the characters and their experiences, fostering empathy and the capacity to view situations from different viewpoints. This, in turn, promotes personal growth and self-reflection as readers explore their own mindsets in relation to the themes presented in the text. It is very helpful for teachers to be able to provide narratives that may inspire the adolescent reader to rethink their own assumptions and contribute to their personal growth.

The whole point of becoming competent in something is to be able to apply that competence in real-life contexts (NOU 2015:8 10). In-depth-learning goes beyond the surface-level and delves into intricacies, complexities, and nuances of the matter (10, my translation). The pupils’ personal understanding of what they have learned and their ability to apply the acquired knowledge is important for achieving competence (NOU 2015:8, 10, my translation). In-depth-knowledge revolves around acquiring information, exploring different perspectives, and gaining a deeper understanding of underlying concepts and principles within the subject. However, reaching competence also requires in-depth-knowledge. On the other hand, in-depth-learning can be considered to be broader knowledge that can be applied across different subjects, based on acquired knowledge and skills which the pupil has learned to recognize of and reflect upon. Bland states that “the training of deep reading is a valuable and constructive component of the in-depth learning[.]” (73). In depth-learning is an ideal in the Norwegian education and it empowers individuals to fully grasp the meaning of a subject which allows them to engage in discussions and confidently navigate more complex issues in real-life situations.

## 4 *When Jays Fly to Barbmo*

The central aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the connection between literature depicting cultural minorities from an adolescent perspective and the development of intercultural competence, critical thinking skills, and identification. The following chapter will explore how these topics come to light in Balderson's *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* and how the portrayal of these factors relates to and is vital for identification, intercultural competence, and critical thinking. Additionally, this part of the thesis will also explore the inherent didactic potential of the novel in fostering these essential skills and perspectives.

“To include a text by an Australian writer with a Norwegian setting is more unusual, although reading such a text may become more authentic to a locally based readership.” (Larsen 240). Margaret Balderson is an Australian writer and considered an outsider writer in this context. In the spring of 1963, she hitch-hiked to the north of Norway up to Kirkenes and the Russian border, prompting her to return several times. Fascinated by the region, she returned a third time to experience the arctic winter while working in the Tromsø library, where she gathered material and inspiration for the novel. Balderson intimately encountered the rhythmic essence of the north, vividly expressed through the ever-changing seasons. Among them, the Dark Time stood out as a poignant symbol of spiritual oppression, with the spring bringing a profound sense of renewal and miraculous transformation. Despite Balderson's position as an outsider writer, the novel adeptly portrays the domestic life of the character Ingeborg and skillfully captures the diverse cultural encounters in the novel. The portrayal of the beforementioned aspects remains compelling and effectively engages readers, showcasing Balderson's talent for vivid storytelling and nuanced exploration of different cultural dynamics.

### 4.1 Intercultural encounters in the novel

Given the previously outlined didactic value of fiction in part [3.2](#), it is reasonable to propose that engaging with narratives that present intercultural encounters offers valuable opportunities for learning and has the potential to foster personal growth and encourage thoughtful reflection. Therefore, it is worth mentioning some significant meetings in the novel and discussing their didactic potential. The previous exploration of culture and identity underscores the abundance of intercultural encounters in *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* with several

characters warranting examination. Characters such as Ingeborg, The Wood Troll (Per), Anne-Sigri, and Veikko serve as conduits for fostering cultural understanding, critical thinking, and empathy among adolescent readers. The narrative presents adolescents with a thought-provoking journey that can encourage introspection and challenge preconceived assumptions. Witnessing Ingeborg's transformative meetings may broaden the readers' own understanding of intercultural dynamics and highlight the significance of diverse encounters in shaping personal growth and cultural awareness. The impact of Ingeborg's journey on an adolescent will be further investigated later in the chapter.

The protagonist Ingeborg experiences various cross-cultural interactions, and as the timeline unfolds readers witness Ingeborg's transformative experiences. Balderson writes "[...] maybe we will get to see some of the Lapp folk when they come down to the village for their supplies." (21). Ingeborg is eager to witness the return of the Sami people in the spring, as she has always been quite fascinated by this group of people. The Wood Troll takes Ingeborg with him when the Sami people arrive for the summer pastures on the Island, and Ingeborg is very upheld on visible features and notions of 'race'.

"She wore the same dark blue *kofte*, extravagantly braided and be-ribboned, a miniature scarlet bonnet, and a pair of quaint little reindeer boots that curled up at the toes. Her hair was quite fair. That was unusual – but then the Lapps were a mixed race. [...] There was something about her features, together with the very fairness of her colouring, that made me decide that she must be partly Finnish. But her eyes were different. Though blue, they were almond-shaped – and strangely oriental. 'Eyes of the East... eyes of the East...' In my thoughts I found myself echoing the Wood Troll's words." (Balderson 92-93).

The observations and encounters Ingeborg have with the Sami people provide pupils with perspectives and insights into a minority culture. However, the references Ingeborg makes towards visible features of looks and clothing may make the reader uncomfortable. In today's society there is a strong social justice regarding descriptions of 'race' and categorization based on visible features. This excerpt can be a fruitful tool to spark conversation about using the term 'race' and the history of categorization of people. Adolescents may also draw connections and embark on conversations about stereotyping after reading this excerpt. An ideal in such a situation would be that the pupil seeks more information about 'race' and stereotypes, maybe even the historical context of which the novel is written, and critically questions the descriptions made by the protagonist.

Ingeborg spends time with the Sami group which she has discovered to be her family on her mother's side. She explains how one of her cousins stares at her with wide eyes signaling that he has never before engaged in an interaction with someone outside the group (Balderson 115). Ingeborg remarks that at any other age such behavior would be considered rude, however one may come to accept such behavior from young children. There is something valuable in children's innocent wonder and curiousness towards something 'other', 'different' or 'new'. Children are not inherently born with prejudice and discriminatory beliefs; rather, these qualities are acquired through socialization. As children grow and interact with their environment, they absorb information, attitudes, and values from their surroundings. It is through these social interactions and influences, or through engaging in extremist environments, that children begin to develop biases and discriminatory behaviors. Therefore, prejudice and discrimination can be recognized as learned behaviors. By promoting empathy, understanding, and challenging stereotypes, we can help children develop a more inclusive and tolerant worldview, free from prejudice and discrimination.

“Both he and Nils Pedar fulfilled my ideas of what I expected a typical Lapp to look like. They were both dark-haired, short of stature and inclined to be bow-legged.” (Balderson 115). The quoted passage highlights the existence of preconceived notions and stereotypes about certain ethnic groups. The description of the character based on his physical attributes perpetuates a simplistic and generalized image of what is expected from a "typical" male member of the Sami community. This portrayal, influenced by societal biases and limited understanding, demonstrates how deeply ingrained these stereotypes can be. Many Norwegian people may have heard this categorization of a Sami person before and may also discover that they are inclined to the same presumption themselves. As earlier stated, such affiliations can have unfortunate effects on individuals' psychological well-being (CoE 16). Recognizing and challenging these stereotypes requires a heightened level of awareness and self-reflection. It demands individuals to question their own assumptions, biases, and the sources from which they derive their understanding. Instructional settings create a space for which a dialogue about the representations of different cultures can happen. This passage may make the reader uncomfortable and spark reflection within the reader.

When Ingeborg engages with the Sami group for the first time she engages contact with a little girl. The little girl only speaks Sami, while Ingeborg is not yet fully proficient in Sami. Here the language imbalance between two people is made evident. One aspect within intercultural competence is, as elaborated in the theoretical framework, language awareness.

“Intercultural competence therefore involves an awareness of the role of language competences in intercultural encounters.” (CoE 17). A difference in language proficiency may create asymmetry and difference in power within the interaction (CoE 17). In this case, one can question whether it is the little girl that holds the linguistic advantage, or if it is Ingeborg. Recognizing the importance of language in intercultural encounters is vital. An important part of intercultural competence is acknowledging the role of language in communication while striving to bridge language gaps through language learning, interpretation, mediator roles, or the use of alternative communication strategies.

Ingeborg explains that The Wood Troll has explained to her that the ‘Sea Lapps’ and the Kvaen are able to exist in harmony (Balderson 55). However, she elaborates on the relationship they have with the Norwegian village people. “But sometimes there is resentment towards their Norwegian neighbours who are invariably better off than they and who are reluctant to accept either Kvaens or Sea Lapps on the same social level.” (Balderson 55). This excerpt can serve as a constitute for the discussion of the Sami, Sea Sami and Kvaen people as foreigners or ‘someone else’. Pupils may notice the regard towards social levels, and the discussion of Sami history may emerge. The oppression and Norwegianisation of the Sami people are a dark part of Norwegian history, which has to be taught and discussed in the classroom. This excerpt can be used to provoke questions and reflections on social inequality, and seek relate social injustice to the world today.

One of the most diverse characters in the novel is Per, mostly known as The Wood Troll. The reader learns that there is not easy to determine ‘what he is’ or ‘where he is from.’ At one point in the novel, Ingeborg can suddenly hear a weird humming or melancholy song that she cannot quite figure out what is (Balderson 29). The Wood Trolls also sings it in an unfamiliar tongue. This is Ingeborg’s encounter with *joik*, a form of cultural expression of deep spiritual nature for Sami people. The Wood Troll nervously admits it *might* be a Sami song. May The Wood Troll’s reluctance to revealing what the sound was may allude to a shame or even potential danger of being Sami? This situation will most likely leave the reader wondering why The Wood Troll is so reluctant about revealing his background and prompt the reader to questions themselves and reflect upon this reluctance.

Intercultural encounters in fiction are often used for reflection, and usually involve conflict (Dypedahl 131). Which stands in contrast to intercultural encounters in real life. “Literature, thus, provides insights into constructed secondary worlds, which ‘may help readers

develop empathy with and solidarity for the characters portrayed (Alter 151). Through fictional narratives, readers are presented with opportunities to delve into diverse identities and perspectives, prompting them to expand their understanding of life (Carlsen 210). Using literature to develop intercultural competence is relevant because fictional narratives encourage individuals to put themselves in the position of the fictional character and position their viewpoint (Bredella 2008; Lütge 111). By incorporating diverse voices from different cultural backgrounds, these texts effectively introduce a wide range of perspectives into the classroom (111). Literature serves as a gateway to diverse cultures, allowing readers to immerse themselves in narratives that transcend their own experiences, and YAF often features characters that are easy to identify with which may appeal to students that struggle with motivation (Carlsen 216). With the objective of using literature for intercultural learning one has to pay attention to how the reader responds (Bland 72) to for example conflicts in the narrative. Reflection on incidents in fictional narratives have become common in intercultural training (131). “Literature represents ‘otherness’, and through fictional texts students are offered insights to worlds they may not be familiar with (Volkman 2010; Alter 157). Pupils can enhance their ability to communicate and interact effectively in diverse cultural settings by reading literature that stimulates intercultural learning. Fictional intercultural encounters can provide good learning opportunities for fostering cultural understanding and encouraging critical thinking.

## **4.2 Fostering cultural understanding and critical thinking**

Dypedahl puts forward that “intercultural awareness is not only about being aware of differences; it also includes being able to have a meta-perspective if what is going on” (130). A meta-perspective requires the awareness and the ability to reflect over one’s own biases, assumptions, and interpretations of different cultures. Individuals are able to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of intercultural encounters by adopting a meta-perspective making them able to navigate such encounters with openness and respect. Practically, it means the ability to challenge personal cultural norms and appreciate different perspectives. Such awareness allows fosters understanding and respect in cross-cultural meetings.



Understanding is, according to Reichl, fragmentary and tentative, “subject to construction (rather than deconstruction) by the individual, has a subjective as well as an intersubjective component, and can be constructed through and in dialogue” (2009; Reichl 116). Processes of understanding are often automatic and not consciously experienced. Cultivating awareness of subjective understanding is a part of the development of intercultural competence and critical thinking. Subjective understanding can be extended and modified intersubjectively in the classroom through interaction and dialogue (Steig; Reichl 116). By asking questions about a work, facilitating conversation and discussion awareness of understanding can be developed. However, total comprehension cannot be fully achieved, and the process of understanding is gradual rather than a product at the end of a straightforward process (Reichl 116). Sparking this awareness within adolescents is an extensive task for teachers, and Reichl points to Kramsch’s notion that “[u]nderstanding and shared meaning, when it occurs, is a small miracle” (1993; 116).

One significant conflict in the novel provides an excellent opportunity for the development of cultural understanding and critical thinking skills. The conflict revolves around Anne-Sigri and The Wood Troll, highlighting the challenges of cultural biases and narrow-mindedness. Anne-Sigri, portrayed as a strong yet narrow-minded woman, harbors deep resentment towards The Wood Troll due to his German descent. She unjustly labels him as a Nazi solely based on his nationality and forbids him entry into the house, confining him to live in his shed. In a thought-provoking conversation between Ingeborg and The Wood Troll, Ingeborg argues “[b]ut if you were born there, I can’t see how you can be anything else but German,” (43), to which The Wood Troll responds, "I don't suppose I am anything." This interaction prompts the reader to question the essence of a person's identity and the impact of nationality and culture. The emotional response evoked from considering The Wood Troll’s perspective can encourage readers to examine their own biases and preconceptions regarding nationality and culture and how their preconceptions impact others. The interaction also helps the reader consider how negative predispositions can unfairly influence perceptions and treatment of individuals based on their background. The happiness and well-being of an individual can be heavily affected in a negative manner by others ascribing them inappropriate identities (CoE 16). Being able to move from one's perspective and take on the perspectives of someone else is central to the advancement of good intercultural competence (Dypedahl and Bøhn 91). By presenting this conflict the novel invites readers to feel empathy and compassion

for *The Wood Troll* and prompt critical thinking about the dangers of making sweeping generalizations based on nationality.

The narrative is situated during the second world war, giving teachers an opportunity to work with the novel interdisciplinary with History or Social Studies. Ingeborg is troubled by her aunt's extreme attitudes towards *The Wood Troll*, prompting Veikko to remark "He might be a German,' [...] 'but he's no Nazi.'" (89). This statement by Veikko encourages readers to reflect upon how an entire group can be held accountable based solely on their heritage, even if they have no present affiliations with the (in this case) country in question. However, the CoE makes sure to highlight that:

"While the definition of intercultural competence provided [in the pamphlet] states that such competence involves respecting people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself, it is important to distinguish between respect for people and respect for actions. Human beings and their inalienable human rights, and the dignity and equality of all people, should always be respected, but there are limits to the respect which should be accorded to actions: respect should be withheld from actions which violate the fundamental principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Actions which violate these principles should not be condoned on the grounds of "cultural difference." (CoE 17).

Engaging in conversations about the Nazi regime and how it was sometimes associated with all Germans is significant. Exploring the Second World War necessitates reflection on the fact that ordinary citizens did not always share the ideology of those who governed the country—a notion applicable to contemporary situations in Europe. However, it is equally important to hold ideological groups accountable for their actions. By delving into these topics, teachers can foster critical thinking among pupils and promote a nuanced understanding of historical events. It encourages students to question generalizations, challenge stereotypes, and recognize the individual agency within cultural and historical contexts. Through such discussions, students develop the capacity to navigate complex issues of responsibility, cultural diversity, and the preservation of human rights.

A significant moment occurs when *The Wood Troll* explains to Ingeborg why her aunt had a strained relationship with Ingeborg's mother. He states, "And in the second place, your mother was Lappish - and to your aunt, anyone who isn't a true Norwegian through and through

is little better than a barbarian." (Balderson 103). This interaction prompts readers to critically assess how the reactions and disagreements of others can impact the dynamics between individuals. This situation serves as a lesson on the consequences of being afraid to be honest and open, which can lead to tragic outcomes. It is revealed to the reader that Anne-Sigri herself was deeply troubled by her narrow-minded principles towards others. This lesson effectively communicates the importance of someone bravely setting an example of acceptance and challenging limited attitudes. By examining these excerpts and engaging in discussions around them, educators can encourage students to think critically about the impact of prejudice, biases, and the significance of honest communication in building understanding and harmony among individuals. It prompts pupils to analyze the complexities of human relationships, challenge preconceived notions, and consider the transformative power of empathy and acceptance.

It is important to recognize that ignorance does not always occur from the majority towards the minority. In the novel, a realization unfolds when the narrator expresses, "I knew that some of the ignorant village people were inclined to believe that the Lapps were a race of uncivilized and backward barbarians, but I had no idea that the Lapps themselves looked down at people who lived a so-called 'civilized' life." (113). This revelation challenges conventional assumptions and highlights the existence of ignorance and prejudice within every cultural group. Educators can utilize this excerpt as a starting point for looking at stereotypes from various perspectives and facilitate for a critical view on how harmful assumptions may influence intercultural relations.

"As the features of a Lapp girl they were somehow perfect. I traced my fingers over my high cheek-bones and then laughed. [...] still staring at my own reflection, and suddenly realized that it was my eyes. They were narrower than those of the other girls on the island, and they looked somehow as though they had been cut at the corners. [...] Eyes of the east... eyes of the East" (Balderson 47-49).

Building on the discussion about physical features in section [4.1](#), the quotation above illuminates Ingeborg's apparent sense of pride in possessing features that are often regarded as stereotypical. Embracing such features may signify a sense of belonging and connection for Ingeborg, fostering a sense of pride and self-acceptance. Proudly owning visual stereotypical characteristics can be a way of celebrating diversity and promoting inclusivity. It sends a message that diversity shall be embraced and respected, challenging the notion that certain features are superior or inferior. However, one should problematize the role of visual

characteristics as well. Ingeborg's assumed pride in her stereotypical features may reflect a sense of belonging and self-acceptance, while also promoting diversity and challenging societal norms. However, it is important to critically examine the role of visual characteristics in shaping perceptions and potential biases.

The Sami population have been portrayed as victims of colonialism and cultural suppression, which is an accurate notion as they have faced significant challenges in preserving their language, culture, and way of life. However, the Sámi people are portrayed as active agents in shaping their own future, advocating for their rights, and promoting their culture and identity. Recent tendencies in Norwegian media showcase Sami adolescents standing up against discrimination (which still occur), the destruction of land, and engaging in environmental matters. Such representations play a vital role in challenging stereotypes and fostering a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the Sámi people and their valuable contributions to society.

Cultural understanding and critical thinking are important abilities in our interconnected and diverse world. Cultural understanding allows individuals to appreciate and respect different belief systems, practices, and perspectives, fostering empathy, tolerance, and cooperation across cultural boundaries. It promotes inclusivity, reduces prejudice and discrimination, and facilitates effective communication and collaboration in intercultural contexts. Critical thinking enabling pupils to make informed decisions and navigate complex issues. It helps to challenge biases, stereotypes, and misinformation, fostering intellectual growth, problem-solving skills, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* cultivate cultural understanding and critical thinking by presenting conflicts that revolve around different cultural elements. Through these conflicts, readers are prompted to explore other perspectives, critically assess preconceived assumptions, and develop a sense of empathy towards the characters in the novel. These conflicts may make it easier for readers to relate to a character that is different from themselves which may provide a deeper appreciation for the character's experiences and perspective. The novel encourages readers to reflect on their own beliefs and biases, fostering empathy and tolerance towards diverse cultures. By engaging with the complex issues depicted in the story, readers develop critical thinking skills, such as analyzing multiple viewpoints, evaluating the consequences of actions, and considering the broader societal implications of cultural conflicts.

### 4.3 The importance of identification and representation for identity construction

Given its portrayal of a Sami narrative, *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* may hold significant value in the classroom, particularly for adolescents of Sami heritage who can find a sense of identification with the characters in the novel. By incorporating this book as an option in the classroom, teachers create an inclusive learning environment where students of Sami background are represented. Identification refers to the psychological alignment of oneself with someone or a group, leading to a deep emotional connection (Merriam-Webster “identification”). In relation to literature, identification is considered as a process where a reader relates to, and empathizes, with a character in a novel. Texts that incorporate a local or contemporary backdrop provide a greater opportunity for readers to identify with and recognize their own experiences within the narrative (Larsen 239). Being able to identify with the characters can make the reading experience more meaningful and enriching for the individual. In the development of young individuals, identification plays a significant role, and literature often becomes a vehicle through which such identification occurs, which the character Ingeborg highlight as well:

“Sometimes I made notes from the books I was reading. Often the thoughts of some great writer stirred me deeply because I found that his thoughts were my thoughts – only moved to a different time and a different place. It helped me to understand myself a little better, for I had begun to feel that it was important to understand myself.” (Balderson 150).

Identification within literature is a powerful tool for promoting positive identity formation. Identification is important for enhancing emotional engagement with the text and promoting a sense of connection and community. When readers see themselves reflected in the experiences and struggles of characters, they become more emotionally invested in the story and journey of the character leading to a more meaningful reading experience. This process of identification encourages personal growth, self-reflection, and inspires readers to make positive changes in their own lives. It provides a sense of validation and belonging, as readers find solace in discovering characters who resonate with their own experiences, ultimately reinforcing the notion of "someone who is like me."

Indigenous representation in literature may promote positive identity formation and provide a sense of empowerment among indigenous adolescents. These narratives challenge

dominant colonial narratives and perspectives imposed on indigenous groups throughout history. Indigenous representation in literature can help reclaim indigenous histories and cultures and inspire activism towards injustice and inequalities based on cultural differences. Through positive portrayals of indigenous cultures, literature counters negative misinterpretations perpetuated by colonialism and mainstream media, nurturing a sense of pride, and belonging in indigenous readers. By showcasing traditional practices and beliefs, these narratives strengthen cultural identity and foster a deeper connection to one's heritage. However, it is important to approach representation in a respectful and appropriate manner. Respecting the agency of indigenous people and avoiding the portrayal of indigenous cultures as objects or stereotypes is of utmost importance. Collaborating with intercultural communities becomes essential to ensure authenticity and accurate representation of diverse perspectives. By working together, we can ensure that indigenous voices are heard, their stories are told with integrity, and their cultures is portrayed in a respectful and accurate manner. There is a need for more representations of Sami indigenous narratives considering the culture being an integral part of the Nordic region and in relation to the historical underrepresentation of Sami culture in all aspects of society. One notion is that more works in Sami can be translated to other languages to create diversity (See Gaski 2013 for more justification for Sami representation in academia).

*When Jays Fly to Barbmo* contain various representations of Sami culture, making it highly relevant to discussions of identity. The young character in the novel is on an identity quest (Docker, 2010; Hirsch, 1979; Larsen 233). Throughout the narrative, significant aspects of Sami culture are interwoven, exemplified by Ingeborg's encounter with The Wood Troll's melodic joik (Balderson 29). Joik, a traditional form of expression deeply rooted in nature and the Sami culture, features unique vocal styles characterized by melodic patterns, emotional expression, and improvisation. Additionally, materialistic representations, such as the kofte that Ingeborg tries on, play a pivotal role in portraying the rich cultural heritage of the Sami people.

“I walked towards the cracked piece of glass and was staggered by my own reflection. But for my height, I was an exact replica of some of the Lapp girls who came in the summer to our island.” (Balderson 46).

In this paragraph readers are provided with the first foreshadowing of Ingeborg's missing heritage. Ingeborg grapples with the anguish caused by the secrecy, pretense, and limited knowledge surrounding her half-hidden heritage (Balderson 55). This poignant portrayal underscores the significance of knowledge and identification for identity formation.

Ingeborg keenly senses the absence of a vital part of her heritage and denied the opportunity to engage with and identify with that neglected half. Adolescence is often regarded as the most crucial period for identity formation. Identification is an important aspect of that formation because it allows individuals to establish connection to certain groups, characters, or experiences. When individuals identify with someone or something, they perceive similarities in values, beliefs, or experiences. This identification process provides a framework for understanding oneself and the shaping of personal identity. By identifying with positive role models, relatable characters, or cultural representations, individuals can explore and define their own values, aspirations, and cultural or social affiliations. Identification therefore offers a way to explore different aspects of identity, validate one's own experiences, and gain a sense of self-worth and belonging, which are crucial elements in the development of a strong and coherent personal identity.

“But though as a Lapp I longed to behold the sea for the first time that spring – as Ingeborg Nygaard, the girl from the island farm, I dreaded seeing it all again with my new, old eyes. I knew she was still there, even though I had ignored her and had sometimes succeeded in forgetting all about her during those long winter months on the *vidda*.” (Balderson 195)

Inhabiting multiple identities can sometimes lead to internal conflicts, as experienced by Ingeborg. Navigating, and making sense of, multiple identities can be challenging. For individuals with dual ethnic or cultural backgrounds, finding resonance with characters who face similar identity struggles can be validating and offer a sense of reassurance and support in the process of identity formation. Indulging in fiction that portray similar challenges as ones' own can provide a feeling of belonging and help individuals realize that their experiences are shared by others. Witnessing the characters navigate through their identity struggles may offer perspectives applicable to the readers' own challenges and encourage self-awareness. Witnessing characters overcome their obstacles and embracing their true selves, even if it is within one culture or between multiple identities, can be a source of inspiration and encouragement that can be applied to the individuals' own life.

Engaging with literature provides adolescents with a unique opportunity to connect with a diverse range of characters, fostering self-reflection and personal growth. Through the journeys and experiences of these literary characters, adolescents can find a reflection of their own thoughts, emotions, and struggles. This identification process enables adolescents to gain

a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. Representation in literature can foster a deeper connection to ones' own cultural heritage and promote a sense of validation and empowerment. By immersing themselves in various narratives, adolescents can expand their perspectives, develop empathy, and enhance their capacity for critical thinking. Literature becomes an incentive for self-discovery, encouraging introspection and consideration of new ideas.

#### **4.4 Outdated language – the problematic use of “lapp”**

The term "Lapp" has historically been associated with negative connotations of colonialism and racism, making it derogatory and offensive term that reinforces a history of oppression and Norwegianization. In this thesis, I have deliberately chosen to use the term "Sami" instead, despite the novel by Balderson using the term "lapp." The term "lapp" was predominantly used by non-native individuals, which contributed to its negative implications. Over time, the Sami people advocated for the use of the term "Sámi" which aligns with how they refer to themselves. This preference was extended to the Norwegian, Finnish, and Swedish languages. The term “same” (meaning Sámi) was acknowledged in formal use in the 1930s. Using the term Sámi or Sami has also been recognized for use internationally. However, the term ‘Lapp’ is still used internationally about the native people of Norway, this is much due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about how it affects the group of natives it denotes. Today, using words as “lapp” or other words instead of using “sami” is perceived as negative, and when used by individuals outside the indigenous group, it is considered abusive or discriminatory language. (Berg-Nordlie and Nesheim)

Using the word ‘lapp’ in 2023 is problematic for a number of reasons. There are negative historical connotations to the terms associated with racism and using the term perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforce historical power imbalances. Furthermore, using the term goes against what the indigenous group themselves have expressed to be their preferred terminology. Disregarding this wish is disrespectful and communicates a lack of cultural awareness. In addition, using derogatory terms undermines efforts of inclusivity, cultural awareness, and respect for diversity. It is important to use language that reflects contemporary understanding and acknowledges and respects the wishes of the indigenous group in question. However, the novel is not written in recent years. Its release in 1968 explains the use of the term, as it was not yet established with such negative connotations yet. Balderson’s use of the



term, however, provides teachers with examples that can be used to practice critical assessment and intercultural learning in the classroom.

Reflecting on the use of derogatory terms towards indigenous groups will contribute to the development of critical thinking skills by prompting individuals to question and analyze the power dynamics, historical context, and impact of such language. It requires a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and historical factors that contribute to the marginalization and discrimination faced by indigenous communities. Teachers can use examples from Balderson's novel as a basis for discussion about derogatory language against minority groups within society. One example might be: "And maybe we will get to see some of the Lapp folk when they come down to the village for their supplies." (Balderson 21). By reflecting upon the use of derogatory terms, individuals can critically evaluate the harmful effects language has on identity, self-worth, and collective well-being. The process of reflection and negotiating meaning together helps develop intercultural competence. Developing critical thinking skills in relation to derogatory terms involves questioning the effects of negative language on indigenous individuals.

In conclusion, the term "Lapp" carries negative historical connotations associated with colonialism and racism. Its usage perpetuates harmful stereotypes and power imbalances, disregards the preferred terminology of the Sami people, and lacks cultural awareness. Using derogatory terms undermines inclusivity, cultural awareness, and respect for diversity. It is essential to use language that reflects contemporary understanding and respects the wishes of the indigenous group. However, in the context of Balderson's novel, which was published in 1968, the use of the term "Lapp" can be understood within the historical context of the time. Despite its outdated usage, the novel can serve as a valuable resource for teachers to facilitate critical assessment and intercultural learning in the classroom. Reflecting on the use of derogatory terms towards indigenous groups contributes to the development of critical thinking skills by prompting individuals to analyze power dynamics, historical context, and the impact of such language. Teachers can utilize examples from the novel to initiate discussions about derogatory language and its effects on marginalized communities. By critically evaluating the harmful effects of negative language, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by indigenous communities and foster intercultural competence.

## 5 Didactical Considerations

### 5.1 Facilitating the development of intercultural competence

In the framework for the Norwegian lector program for secondary and upper secondary school teachers, it is stated that the candidates shall become qualified to further develop the Norwegian school as an institution of learning and development in a democratic and multicultural society (Forskrift om rammeplan for lektorutdanning, 2013, §1, my translation). Further, it is specifically stated that the candidates shall qualify to perpetuate the teaching of Sámi relations, the global status of indigenous groups, and the rights of Sámi youth in line with the Education Act and the Norwegian National Curriculum (Forskrift om rammeplan for lektorutdanning, 2013, §1, my translation). The teacher program should also include subjects with Sámi content, however, to what extent that ideal is fulfilled is questionable. Teacher education programs, the Education Act, and the NNC clearly state that knowledge of the Sámi people and culture has a priority in Norwegian education.

In a recent study of student teachers' orientation towards cultural diversity in schools, it appears that Norwegian student teachers are uncomfortable talking about notions of 'race' and 'colour' (Thomassen & Munthe, 2020; Larsen 239). The sensitivity surrounding these subjects combined with societal taboos may discourage an open dialogue about such topics. The fear of being misunderstood or 'saying the wrong thing,' inadvertently causing offense or coming off as insensitive, may contribute to the discomfort of addressing notions of race and color. Another factor that may complicate the conversation is guilt and shame of the historical legacy of racism and discrimination. People in positions of privileges may feel uncomfortable acknowledging and confronting their own advantages. The discomfort surrounding the conversation about race and color highlight the need for a safe and inclusive space where open dialogue, empathy, and understanding can take place.

The 'pedagogy of discomfort,' introduced by Boler in 1999, represents an educational approach that encourages both educators and students to actively explore and critically examine their values, norms, and preconceived notions. This approach is based on the belief that experiencing discomforting emotions plays a vital role in questioning prevailing beliefs, social norms, and practices that perpetuate stereotypes and social injustice (Røthing 44). By embracing such discomfort, individuals can create opportunities for empathy and transformative change, ultimately challenging and transforming the existing social landscape

(41). The discomfort can be considered a resource for addressing sensitive topics in a respectful manner and creating opportunities of critical reflection and introspection. When we experience discomfort, it indicates that we are stepping outside of our comfort zones and engaging with ideas that may be unfamiliar or challenging. This discomfort prompts us to reevaluate our own attitudes and making potential transformative changes.

Before initiating a conversation or discussion about identity and culture it is important to establish an environment that is safe and inclusive. A safe and inclusive classroom environment is the most crucial elements to make sure that it is possible to initiate critical conversations about culture and identity, an argument supported by Lund and Villanueva (151). Teachers and pupils must mutually recognize the importance of discouraging prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination, while actively promoting respect, empathy, and open-mindedness. It is crucial to create an inclusive learning environment where diverse perspectives are welcomed and encouraged. This does not imply that opposing views should be ignored or silenced, but rather that they should be explored and discussed in a manner that fosters respect and understanding among individuals. By engaging in respectful dialogue, both teachers and students can cultivate an atmosphere of mutual learning and growth, where differing opinions can be shared and examined constructively to allow reflection.

To foster the development of intercultural competence, a collaborative effort is required from teachers, schools, and curriculum developers. Teachers play a crucial role in this process by integrating multicultural perspectives into various subjects. Creating interdisciplinary teaching sequences that promote deep learning is particularly effective. This can be achieved through engaging activities such as group projects, discussions, debates, excursions, interdisciplinary projects, and collaborative tasks. Educators can provide opportunities for intercultural experiences by establishing contact with teachers and pupils from other countries facilitating letter exchanges or digital communication. Fictional literature offers a valuable avenue for cultural exploration as it provides insights into several cultural aspects and narratives, as well as different kinds of conflicts to spark reflection. The use of literature for the development of intercultural competence is significant as fictional narratives prompt individuals to empathize with the characters and adopt their perspectives (Bredella, 2008; Lütge, 111). By incorporating a multitude of voices from diverse cultural backgrounds, these texts effectively introduce a wide range of perspectives within the classroom setting (111). Teachers could use excerpts from works like *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* to stimulate discussion, portrayal of other perspectives or for motivating the pupils. However, it is important to note

that the teacher's role is that of a facilitator, intervening only to make the learning processes explicit. Students should be encouraged to develop critical thinking and reflections independently, empowering them to construct their own understandings and perspectives.

Using local resources to help facilitate the development of intercultural competence may be beneficial where educators may lack extensive knowledge. For example, Johanson discovered that teachers in Alta collaborated with the local museum on different projects due to the lack of information in textbooks and other sources (204-205). Using local resources may make past incidents easier to comprehend for pupils.

“According to the teachers, local history and culture create enthusiasm, participation, understanding, critical thinking and recognition. The teachers also used Sámi culture and history to discuss and integrate democratic values such as equality and diversity. The teachers explicitly used local history to promote local Sámi culture and history, and to build identities and create meaning (in life).” (Johanson 198).

Local history can help pupils engage in discussions and constitute motivation to explore different perspectives through alternative narratives. In addition, local contexts can contribute to the pupil developing a better understanding of the past due to witnessing the story in the context of their own life (Fossen 2005; Johanson 199). Doing this can be especially beneficial in the teaching of the Second World War and how the Sami were affected by that time, which can be done simultaneously with a conversation about the portrayal of the Second World War through Ingeborg’s perspective. To see how teachers in Alta organized such teaching sessions, and a summary of which questions emerged from the the pupils, see Johanson 2018.

In the classroom, subjective understanding can be expanded and adjusted through interactive dialogue and collective interpretation (Steig; Reichl 116). Dialogue plays a significant role in fostering intercultural understanding and critical thinking, making it one of the key approaches for teaching intercultural competence. When a safe and tolerating environment is established, it is important to relate the topics at hand to what the learners already know (Lund and Villanueva 150). Learners should always be encouraged to openly discuss and articulate their own experiences and understanding, recognizing the personal relevance it holds for them (151). Everyday topics can be used to teach IC and critical thinking, and making the most of teachable moments facilitates acquisition of IC. Lund and Villanueva

stress that absolutely any topic can be used to teach intercultural competence if it is explored from many different and new perspectives (162).

The components mentioned in [3.1](#) “can be used to formulate lesson plans and learning objectives. At the end of the lesson or a program, learners can for example be expected to be able to describe the notion of self-awareness and reflect on its relevance for intercultural communication. Lessons that take up respect and relationship building can be designed so that learners are able to explain these concepts and also relate them to situations that they are familiar with. With regard to activities, they should preferably address real-life examples and situations. A key point is to focus on issues that are relevant for the learners to work with situations of interaction that they have experienced or are likely to experience themselves.” (Deardoff; Dypedahl and Lund 22).

The most complicated element in the acquisition of intercultural competence and critical thinking skills relates to assessing these competences. Assessment of IC is somewhat controversial due to the fact that one evaluates a persons’ attitudes (Dypedahl and Bøhn 94). However, there have been designed models for assessment to improve pupils’ awareness of intercultural communication, where most of the methods are self-assessment (94). Deardoff, however, has worked out a rubric where students can rate themselves on a scale of criteria for IC (Dypedahl and Bøhn 94). Evaluating intercultural competence and critical thinking skills require more research and further development (95), and a solution may be to make use of several assessment methods. Self-assessment, combined with assessment situations such as roleplays, enables teachers to observe and evaluate students' demonstration of intercultural competence (95). This approach provides valuable insights into the students' progress in the learning process and their level of self-awareness.

Developing interculturally competent individuals require an interculturally competent teacher. Educators have to possess extensive knowledge of intercultural competence, critical thinking skills, and cognitive processes within adolescents. Teaching elements of culture and cultural differences require extensive metacognitive abilities within the teacher. The educator has to be conscious of their own prejudices and predispositions that one brings into the teaching. Engaging in a reflective process and openly discussing one's own predispositions can be done by verbalizing the thought process in front of the pupils. Demonstrating the act of metacognitive reflection in front of the pupils can be beneficial.

There are several limitations associated with the development of intercultural competence and critical thinking skills. One challenge relates to the limited resources available to teachers and schools. Additionally, adolescents are undergoing significant personal and cognitive development during the formation process, and the cultivation of intercultural competence and critical thinking skills is a lifelong process that aligns with their overall formation. Therefore, even the best approaches to teaching intercultural competence may not prove fruitful due to pupils' individual differences in maturity level. Furthermore, there is currently no consensus or established framework for assessing intercultural competence, adding another layer of complexity. Additionally, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, the primary focus is on engaging with the English language and works of fiction that hold significance within English-speaking cultures. This leaves limited space for the inclusion of Sami narratives, considering that curricula already prioritize the study of other indigenous groups worldwide. Another potential pitfall in teaching intercultural competence is the risk of inadvertently creating stereotypes or generalizations about other cultures. It is crucial for teachers to avoid oversimplifying the intricate nature of culture or making assumptions based on superficial characteristics. Therefore, educators need to be well-prepared and knowledgeable, actively engaging in their own development of intercultural competence. They should also seek more information through research to navigate the challenges of teaching in a diverse and globalized world.

The facilitation of intercultural competence and critical thinking requires a collaborative effort from teachers and educators. It is essential that the teacher ensures a safe and inclusive classroom environment built on principles of respect, tolerance, and openness. Intercultural competence is best acquired through dialogue and practical approaches, which, for the teacher, requires extensive knowledge about didactical approaches and cognitive processes. Teachers also have to acknowledge their own biases and prejudices that they bring into the dialogue. Johanson revealed that teachers may benefit from using external sources to provide quality information about topics that have not been given much space in the textbooks. Several YAF novels lend well to teaching intercultural competence, and fictional narratives may spark reflection and critical thinking by proposing alternative perspectives. Essentially, intercultural competence is best acquired through dialogue that entails critical reflections, supported by the guidance of an educator.

## 5.2 Teaching outside the canon

The Norwegian education should have a responsibility to teach about Sami culture and present Sami narratives in literary studies. While indigenous groups from various parts of the world hold significance within the curriculum, it is equally important to recognize the importance of our own Indigenous population in an educational context. The current lack of Sami narratives highlights the demand for literature that reflects their experiences, underscoring the need to incorporate these narratives into literary studies and provide pupils with a deeper understanding of Sami culture.

In Harold Bloom's *Western Canon*, we find what is believed to be the most powerful and influential works of literature considered to have formed the basis of Western literary tradition. These works are the ideals of Western culture and Bloom argued that the study of literature should focus on canonical works. Although Bloom's canon has been critiqued for its narrow focus, his work has been highly influential in the literary discourse. Books that are taught in Norwegian EFL classrooms are dominated by British and American canonical literature, understandably. It is important that literature is experienced as an authentic action (Larsen 231), involving a personal and emotional investment in the story. Choosing texts outside the canon will provide a wider range of texts that individuals can engage and invest themselves in. Reading outside the traditional literary canon gives us an opportunity to get to know other texts that illuminate thematic aspects regarding formation and maturation in different settings reflecting the historic and current status of English as a world language (Larsen 241). Some argue that teaching outside the canon may lack relevance and therefore not be as valuable to study due to the limited time and resources within education. It is considered more practical to prioritize canonical works that are extensively studied and have established curricula and teaching materials readily accessible for educators.

Introducing a novel that is set in Norway and written by an Australian writer may offer a unique and authentic reading experience, particularly for readers who are familiar with the local context of the novel. This does not imply disregarding the existing literary canon but rather expanding and diversifying it, including a broader range of texts, and allowing students to choose their own reading materials. By embracing a literary canon that encompasses global perspectives, literature can resonate more deeply with a wider audience, making it more relevant and meaningful. (Larsen 240).

In addition, Balderson's novel was released in the late sixties and is a novel difficult to get a hold of these days. Although the novel provides several contexts that are valuable for the cultivation of intercultural competence and critical thinking, one would have to make an effort to revive the novel. Reviving a novel can reach a wider range of readers and contribute to preserve literary history, while also proving that important voices and stories are not lost to future generations. Despite its age, a novel like *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* remains relevant due to its timeless themes and universal messages, offering insight into the past and its influence on the present. Lesser-known books can provide unique perspectives and voices that are often underrepresented in mainstream literature, expanding students' literary horizons, and offering them new and exciting literary experiences that enhance their education.

In the Education Act it is stated that "education and training must help increase the knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and our common international cultural traditions." (1998 1). Pupils shall receive an education that provides "insight into cultural diversity" (The Education Act 1998 1). The pupils are to become critical thinkers equipped with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to master their lives and become active participants in Norwegian society. The Sámi population of Norway has its own legal act protecting their right to develop their language, culture, and way of life (The Sámi Act 1987). The Sámi Act safeguards the Sámi as an indigenous group of Norway and their rights to develop as a part of our country. In recent years there has been a national call for more implementation of Sámi matters in society and education.

The Sami population has faced many challenges when it comes to language, land rights, environmental issues, as well as maintaining their cultural identity in the modern society. It has also been called attention to the lack of representation in literature and academia, despite the fact that the Sami population have made significant contributions to art, music, and literature. However, the traditional ways of telling stories in the Sami culture have been through oral stories which has made it more difficult to implement Sami narratives into the literary discourse. However, literary scholars should acknowledge the lack of Sami perspectives in literature and focus on including Sami literature. The representation of Sami people has been problematic, as they have been portrayed as exotic and mysterious people only attending to the herding of reindeer. Notions of stereotyping and prejudice may occur in academia as well. That may not be the reason for the lack of Sami perspectives within the discourse, however, it is important to reflect upon the reasons for a lack of Sami perspectives in literature.



## 6 Conclusion

Norway is a founding member of the Council of Europe (CoE), and their 2014 pamphlet "Developing intercultural competence through education" provides fundamental references on intercultural competence. To understand intercultural competence, it is crucial to define and understand related terms such as identity, culture, intercultural encounters, and competence itself. Intercultural encounters occur when individuals interact with others from different cultural backgrounds. Such encounters can happen in person or through virtual channels, and they are defined by the recognition of cultural differences. Misunderstandings can arise due to discrepancies in the lenses through which people perceive and interpret the world. Developing intercultural competence is crucial to navigate and bridge cultural divides in an increasingly globalized world. The goal of the development of intercultural competence is to foster understanding, respect, and tolerance in culturally diverse societies, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts while promoting effective communication and collaboration across borders.

In today's increasingly interconnected world, the acquisition of intercultural competence has become paramount for individuals to foster harmony and understanding within the society. It is a valuable skill that every human should possess, and its significance has only grown more pronounced in recent times. Utilizing literature and fiction as a means to develop intercultural competence is an effective approach that holds immense potential. Reading fiction provides pupils with an opportunity to learn about cultures one would normally not encounter or learn anything about. By engaging with diverse narratives and exploring different cultural perspectives through literature, individuals can enhance their ability to navigate and appreciate the complexities of our multicultural world. Fictional stories, as made apparent through *When Jays Fly to Barbmo*, are a powerful tool for fostering empathy and understanding, and enables readers to expand their horizons, challenge stereotypes, and cultivate a deeper sense of intercultural awareness and respect. Embracing literature as a means to develop intercultural competence is therefore a compelling and necessary measure in the English subject on the way towards a harmonious and inclusive society.

The process of identification within literature plays a pivotal role in shaping one's identity, which, in turn, holds significant importance in relation to intercultural competence. Engaging with literature presents adolescents with a distinctive opportunity to establish connections with a diverse array of characters, thereby nurturing self-reflection and personal

development. Through the journeys and encounters of these fictional figures, adolescents discover reflections of their own thoughts, emotions, and challenges. This process of identification empowers them to gain profound insights into themselves and the world around them. The representation of diverse cultures and backgrounds in literature further cultivates a profound connection to an individual's heritage, fostering feelings of validation and empowerment. By immersing oneself in various narratives, adolescents can broaden their horizons, cultivate empathy, and sharpen their critical thinking skills. Literature serves as a catalyst for self-discovery, actively encouraging introspection and the exploration of new ideas.

Intercultural competence and critical thinking skills are lifelong processes that are not easy to evaluate and assess. It is not easy to teach, nor measure, intercultural competence. Teachers and educators must facilitate as best as they can for the development of intercultural competence and engage in scholarly discussions on the topic. By promoting inclusivity and embracing cultural diversity, teachers, parents, and other members of society can build stronger and more vibrant communities that celebrate the richness of the human experience and foster a sense of belonging for all individuals. While acknowledging that this thesis does not present a definitive or flawless approach to developing intercultural competence or critical thinking skills, its purpose is to offer a valuable contribution and serve as a suggestive guide for teaching proficiency in these areas. It aims to provide insights, strategies, and perspectives that can enrich pedagogical practices and promote the cultivation of intercultural understanding and critical thinking abilities among learners.

This thesis sought out to answer how Margaret Balderson's *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* has the potential to cultivate intercultural competence, enhance critical thinking abilities, and foster identification among adolescents. Balderson's novel offers a compelling array of examples that can contribute to foster intercultural competence, critical thinking, and empathy in adolescent readers. Balderson's novel fills a gap in the English subject, and academia, regarding the representation of Sami narratives. Therefore, *When Jays Fly to Barbmo* can and should be used to spark important discussions in the classroom regarding historical events, culture clashes, heritage, culture, and identity. Teaching excerpts of the novel supported with facts about Sami culture and Sami individuals in Norway today, can lead to more understanding and tolerance towards indigenous individuals and serve as an entryway into the discussion of identity, culture, and intercultural encounters. The novel can contribute in a fruitful way through excerpts that constitute the basis for dialogue and discussion. Using the novel in its whole may not be as effective to develop intercultural competence as the excerpts are just as effective.

However, the story and journey of Ingeborg is truly captivating and thought-provoking. Pupils that can identify with Ingeborg's experiences with loss and grief, independence, discovering one's identity and navigating dual ethnicity, may find the novel worth reading in its whole. Through the characters and their stories, the narrative prompts deep introspection and challenges pre-existing beliefs. By immersing oneself within the story, readers are afforded the chance to enhance their ability for critical analysis and empathy, enabling them to explore a multitude of perspectives and gain a deeper comprehension of intricate social and cultural dynamics contributing to their development of intercultural competence and critical thinking skills.

## 7 Works Cited

- Alter, Grit. "Developing Intercultural Competence through First Nations' Children's Literature" In: J. Bland & C. Lütge (eds.), *Children's Literature in Second Language Education*, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 151-158.
- Appel, Markus and Tobias Richter. "Persuasive Effects of Fictional Narratives Increase Over Time." *Media Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2007, pp. 113–134
- Balderson, Margaret. *When Jays Fly to Barbmo*. Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Berg-Nordlie, Mikkel and Asjörn Nesheim. "lapper." *Store norske leksikon*, <https://snl.no/lapper>. Accessed May 5 2023.
- Bland, Janice. "Using Literature for Intercultural Learning in English Language Education". In: Dypedahl, Magne, and Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund (eds.), *Teaching and Learning English Interculturally*, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020, pp. 69 – 89.
- Carlsen, Christian, et al. *Teaching and Learning English*. 2nd ed., Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020.
- Carlsen, Christian. "Reading Literature". In: Carlsen, Christian, et al. (eds.), *Teaching and Learning English*. 2nd ed., Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020, pp. 209-226.
- Council of Europe. "Developing intercultural competence through education", *Pestalozzi Series*, No. 3, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2014. ISBN 978-92-871-7745-2
- Deardorff, Darla K. "Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization." *Journal of Studies in International Education*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2006, pp. 241–266.
- Dypedahl, Magne and Henrik Bøhn. "Intercultural competence and culture". In: Carlsen, Christian, et al. (eds.), *Teaching and Learning English*, 2nd ed., Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020, pp. 81 – 99.
- Dypedahl, Magne, and Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund. "Intercultural Learning and Global Citizenship in the English Language Classroom". In: Dypedahl, Magne, and Ragnhild

- Elisabeth Lund (eds), Teaching and Learning English Interculturally, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020, pp. 10 – 25.
- Dypedahl, Magne, and Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund. Teaching and Learning English Interculturally. Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020.
- Dypedahl, Magne. “Reflection Tools for Intercultural Awareness.” In: Dypedahl, Magne, and Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund (eds), Teaching and Learning English Interculturally, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020, pp. 130 – 149.
- Faris, James C. “Reviewed work: Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities by Stanley Fish.” Language in Society, vol. 12, no. 2, 1983, pp. 252 – 255.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. Truth and Method. Bloomsbury Academic, 1975.
- “Identification.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identification>. Accessed 04 April. 2023.
- “Identity.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity>. Accessed 04 April. 2023.
- Johanson, Lisbeth Bergum. “Using Local Sámi Culture and History to Teach Pupils about Democracy.” Education in the North, vol. 25, no. 1-2, 2018, pp. 198 – 216.
- Kunnskapsdepartementet. Forskrift om rammeplan for lektorutdanning ([LOV-2005-04-01-15-§3-2](https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2013-03-18-288)). Lovdata, 18 March 2013. <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2013-03-18-288>
- Larsen, Annelise Brox. “Authenticity and Literature(s) in Teacher Education: Bildung in Jigalong and Bárbmo,” In: Leo Will et al. (eds.) Authenticity across Languages and Cultures, vol. 157, 2023, pp. 230 – 244.
- Leitch et al., editors. Jacques Derrida: Dissemination. The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism, Norton Company, 2018, pp. 1602 – 1636.
- Lund, Ragnhild Elisabeth and Maria Casado Villanueva. “Intercultural Learning in the Classroom: Some General Principles.” In: Dypedahl, Magne, and Ragnhild Elisabeth

- Lund (eds), Teaching and Learning English Interculturally, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2020, pp. 150 – 163.
- Lütge, Christiane. “Otherness in Children’s Literature. Perspectives for the EFL Classroom.” In: Janice Bland and Christiane Lütge (eds.), Children’s Literature in Second Language Education, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 105-113.
- Ministry of Education and Research. “Core curriculum – values and principles for primary and secondary education” Fastsett som forskrift ved kongelig resolusjon. Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/?lang=eng>
- Ministry of Education and Research. Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education and Training (The Education Act). Lovdata, 27 Nov 1998. <https://lovdata.no/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61>
- Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The Sámi Act. Regjeringen, 12 June 1987. <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-sami-act-/id449701/>
- NOU 2014: 7. “Elevenes læring I fremtidens skole – et kunnskapsgrunnlag”. 2014. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/NOU-2014-7/id766593/>
- NOU 2015: 8. “Fremtidens skole – Fornyelse av fag og kompetanser”. 2015. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-2015-8/id2417001/>
- Reichl, Susanne. “Doing identity, doing culture: Transcultural learning through young adult fiction.” In: Janice Bland and Christiane Lütge (eds), Children’s Literature in Second Language Education, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 114 – 123.
- Røthing, Åse. “Pedagogy of discomfort”- an entry to critical reflection and inclusive teaching?”. FLEKS (Oslo), 2019, Vol.6, no. 1, pp. 40-57. Use in relation to the use of lapp.
- Selden, Raman, et al. A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, 6th ed., Routledge, 2017.
- The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet). “Curriculum in English (ENG01-04)”. 2019. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04>

Wolf, Maryanne and Mirit Barzillai. "The Importance of Deep Reading." In: Marge Scherer (ed.), *Challenging the Whole Child: Reflections on Best Practices in Learning, Teaching, and Leadership*, ASCD, 2009, pp. 130 – 140.

## 8 Appendix

### 8.1 Appendix A

Council of Europe. “Developing intercultural competence through education,” *Pestalozzi Series*, No. 3, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2014. ISBN 978-92-871-7745-2

## 2. The components of intercultural competence

Scholarly research over more than five decades has investigated the nature of intercultural competence, with much of this research producing detailed lists of its components. The following lists of the components of intercultural competence are intended to be indicative rather than exhaustive, and focus primarily on those components which lend themselves to development through education. In reading these lists, readers should keep in mind the description of culture given in the previous section.

The components of intercultural competence may be broken down into attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills and actions.

The **attitudes** involved include:

- valuing cultural diversity and pluralism of views and practices;
- respecting people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own;
- being open to, curious about and willing to learn from and about people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one's own;
- being willing to empathise with people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own;
- being willing to question what is usually taken for granted as 'normal' according to one's previously acquired knowledge and experience;
- being willing to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty;
- being willing to seek out opportunities to engage and co-operate with individuals who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one's own.

The **knowledge** and **understanding** which contribute to intercultural competence include:

- understanding the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups;
- awareness and understanding of one's own and other people's assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices, and overt and covert discrimination;
- understanding the influence of one's own language and cultural affiliations on one's experience of the world and of other people;
- communicative awareness, including awareness of the fact that other peoples' languages may express shared ideas in a unique way or express unique



### Developing intercultural competence through education

---

ideas difficult to access through one's own language(s), and awareness of the fact that people of other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions which are meaningful from their perspective;

- knowledge of the beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products that may be used by people who have particular cultural orientations;
- understanding of processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction, and of the socially constructed nature of knowledge.

The **skills** involved in intercultural competence include skills such as:

- multiperspectivity – the ability to decentre from one's own perspective and to take other people's perspectives into consideration in addition to one's own.
- skills in discovering information about other cultural affiliations and perspectives;
- skills in interpreting other cultural practices, beliefs and values and relating them to one's own;
- empathy – the ability to understand and respond to other people's thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings;
- cognitive flexibility – the ability to change and adapt one's way of thinking according to the situation or context;
- skills in critically evaluating and making judgments about cultural beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products, including those associated with one's own cultural affiliations, and being able to explain one's views;
- skills in adapting one's behaviour to new cultural environments – for example, avoiding verbal and non-verbal behaviours which may be viewed as impolite by people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own;
- linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication;
- plurilingual skills to meet the communicative demands of an intercultural encounter, such as the use of more than one language or language variety, or drawing on a known language to understand another (intercomprehension);
- the ability to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges, including skills in translating, interpreting and explaining.

While attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills are all necessary components of intercultural competence, possessing these components alone is

### The components of intercultural competence

---

insufficient for an individual to be credited with intercultural competence: it is also necessary for these components to be *deployed and put into practice through action* during intercultural encounters. People often profess attitudes and often acquire knowledge and skills which they fail to put into practice. For this reason, in order for an individual to be credited with intercultural competence, they must also apply their intercultural attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills through actions.

Relevant **actions** include:

- seeking opportunities to engage with people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from one's own;
- interacting and communicating appropriately, effectively and respectfully with people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own;
- co-operating with individuals who have different cultural orientations on shared activities and ventures, discussing differences in views and perspectives, and constructing common views and perspectives;
- challenging attitudes and behaviours (including speech and writing) which contravene human rights, and taking action to defend and protect the dignity and human rights of people regardless of their cultural affiliations.

This last may entail any or all of the following actions:

- intervening and expressing opposition when there are expressions of prejudice or acts of discrimination against individuals or groups;
- challenging cultural stereotypes and prejudices;
- encouraging positive attitudes towards the contributions to society made by individuals irrespective of their cultural affiliations;
- mediating in situations of cultural conflict.

In short, at the level of action, intercultural competence provides a foundation for being a **global citizen**. Intercultural competence has strong active, interactive and participative dimensions, and it requires individuals to develop their capacity to build common projects, to assume shared responsibilities and to create common ground to live together in peace. For this reason, intercultural competence is a core competence which is required for democratic citizenship within a culturally diverse world.

Because intercultural competence involves not only attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills but also action, equipping learners with intercultural

