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Addressing Prejudice in Our Multi- Cultural Schools Through Literature

Teaching Robert Swindells's *Ruby Tanya* with Intercultural Pedagogy

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Abstract

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Abstract:

Sweden has developed from a mono-cultural country to a multi-cultural country during the last fifty years. People from all over the world coexist in Sweden, which results in a vast diversity. Unfortunately, this diversity sometimes causes friction, which results in prejudice and discrimination, not least in schools. The only way prejudice and discrimination can be prevented is through knowledge and education. Teachers and leaders in school are responsible to enlighten students about the many cultures, identities, and religions that live in Sweden and to provide a safe environment without discrimination. The aim of this study is therefore to show how tolerance can be taught in school through literature in the subject of English for upper secondary school when used with the pedagogical theory called intercultural pedagogy. The thesis statement for this project is that Robert Swindells's novel *Ruby Tanya* is valuable when addressing prejudice in school. *Ruby Tanya* is a novel that deals with prejudice and discrimination in an obvious manner and also illustrates how severe the consequences of prejudice are. Moreover, there are many other reasons for using literature in the classroom, the students' reading, writing, speaking and listening abilities are improved through literature and they can develop cultural enrichment and critical reading, both relevant tools when learning to coexist in a multi-cultural society.

Key words: Literature, intercultural pedagogy, prejudice, *Ruby Tanya*, discrimination, culture, identity, religion, tolerance, multiculturalism.

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Introduction

Sweden is a multi-cultural country, with people from all over the world. Internationalization and globalization has brought various cultures, religions and values to a country that once was homogenous in all these aspects. Until the 1960s, Sweden was an ethnically, culturally, religiously and socially homogenous country (Sander et al. 25). Diversity like we have today is valuable. However, without knowledge and compassion diversity can also result in prejudice and even worse, in racism. Developing compassion for each other is something that needs to be taught at an early age and therefore schools have a great responsibility. Thus the Swedish curriculum states:

The school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathies. No one in school should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment, or to other forms of degrading treatment. All tendencies to discrimination or degrading treatment should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be confronted with knowledge, open discussion and active measures. ... The internationalization of Swedish society and increasing cross-border mobility place high demands on the ability of people to live with and appreciate the values inherent in cultural diversity. The school is a social and cultural meeting place with both the opportunity and the responsibility to strengthen this ability among all who work there. (Skolverket 4)

That no one in school should be subjected to discrimination and that all tendencies for this kind of behavior should be combatted might seem a given. Nevertheless, there are few guidelines to how we, as teachers, should combat these problems. There is for example a pedagogical approach called intercultural pedagogy, which should be used in all subjects. Nonetheless, 40% of students in school have felt insulted and hurt. Awful as that is, the worst aspect is the fact that all these insults have come from an adult in school. The insults have had exclusionary and derogatory qualities (Lorentsz 21).

This essay will discuss how we can address prejudice and racism in schools and how it can be done by teaching literature together with intercultural pedagogy. The novel I have used for this purpose is Roberts Swindells's *Ruby Tanya*. The novel is suitable for teenagers and it revolves around two young girls, from different cultures, who need to battle the prejudice and incompetence there is in society. The novel is well written and deals with current subjects in our society regarding religious and cultural differences between people. Swindells also emphasizes the importance of the adults' responsibility in this matter and how dangerous and infected prejudice can be if adults act neglectfully.

The aim of this project is to show how teachers can use literature to address prejudice and discrimination in the classroom and to enhance the importance of intercultural pedagogy in school. Intercultural pedagogy is a pedagogy that strives to include all students in the education regardless of what culture, identities or nationality they are from. Teachers should have the tools to address all kind of nationalities, religions, identities or differences people might have. The aim is to include all students through a liberal thought process and to achieve this kind of thought process self-criticism is an important tool. The purpose of this essay is therefore to find a way of teaching tolerance through literature and through the use of intercultural pedagogy at the upper secondary school in Sweden. Pirjo Lahdenperä a researcher within the field of intercultural pedagogy states that

The relationship between intercultural pedagogy and pedagogy as an academic subject is that intercultural pedagogy puts its emphasis on the approach where the cultural aspects are in focus. (35)

In chapter one I will introduce *Ruby Tanya* and argue for the reasons why this novel is suited for this issue. I will also discuss why literature is a relevant way of addressing these questions in the classroom. The first chapter will also touch upon the possible difficulties that might arise when teaching *Ruby Tanya*. The second chapter will explore the terms and theories of multiculturalism and intercultural pedagogy. The third chapter is the analysis where I will show some didactic examples of how the novel can be taught. The fourth and last chapter will contain conclusions and my reflections on the project.

1. Teaching *Ruby Tanya* in the language classroom

This first chapter will discuss why *Ruby Tanya* is a novel worth using in the classroom when addressing prejudice and racism. The novel is introduced and possible difficulties are discussed. Also, I will argue for the relevance of teaching literature in the language classroom.

1.1 Why teach literature in the language classroom?

The syllabus of the English subject states that students need “the ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” and one of the ways of achieving this goal is through “literature and other fiction” (Skolverket 2). Moreover, the syllabus states that students need to be able to use “strategies for listening and reading in different ways and for different purposes” (Skolverket 2). Having the syllabus as a support for teaching literature, we can now further discuss the use of literature in the classroom with the help of scholars within this subject.

In the book *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* Tricia Hedge mentions that reading can imply developing competence in a foreign language, awareness of the structure of written texts and also add to a broader knowledge about the world. Moreover, reading can lead to development of the competence and confidence to keep on reading English even outside the classroom (Hedge 221). More positive reactions to the use of literature in the classroom can be found in the research by Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater. They claim that reading literature and having to use the imagination with a text, learners can turn their attention beyond the mechanical aspects of the foreign language. If the teacher can choose a text that is suited to the learners in the aspects of meaning, enjoyment and relevance to their life experience, the language will become more transparent to them (Collie, Slater 5-6). Furthermore, using literature will also increase the reader’s vocabulary and enable a more extensive knowledge in the language even though the vocabulary learnt from literature is not what is always needed. Collie and Slater instead claim that “literature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable”, meaning that even though we do not use the same vocabulary as used in a text from the 19th century, the familiarity students gain from reading various texts and the variation of structures they will encounter, will increase their ability to not only read but also to write (Collie, Slater 4-5).

Robert Swindells’s *Ruby Tanya* is a text that is easy to read and addresses social issues and living conditions familiar to students in the upper secondary school. The novel therefore

meets both the criteria of the syllabus and the grounds for learning literature according to the scholars. The use of literature is thus not only a good way of teaching; it is also a requirement according to the syllabus.

1.2 Why teach Robert Swindells's *Ruby Tanya*?

When living in a society where various religions and cultures coexist, problems like prejudice will occur. However, problems like these should never be neglected and *Ruby Tanya* is an effective way of dealing with these issues. Robert Swindells addresses prejudice in this novel not only by showing that it is hurtful but also by showing the severe consequences when adults cannot act responsibly and open-mindedly. *Ruby Tanya* is an entertaining and easily read novel, well suited for students at upper secondary school taking English 5.

The novel was published in 2004 and revolves around two young girls, Ruby Tanya and Asra, both living in a little town called Tipton Lacey in England. Ruby Tanya is a strong willed child and the daughter of a British nationalist who is politically active in the little town they live in. Asra is an asylum seeker living in a camp, together with other asylum seeking families. The two are best friends, regardless of Ruby Tanya's father's opinions of their friendship. When a bomb goes off in the girls' school, the blame is immediately put on the asylum seekers and Ruby Tanya's father becomes more active in his quest to remove the camp from Tipton Lacey. The girls, still staying together, take matters in their own hands, which will result in a shocking revelation for the people of the village.

Reading this novel, the important aspect of the adults' behavior interested me. Children and teenagers are easy to influence and if parents and teachers say or act in a way that can encourage prejudice the results might be devastating. Ruby Tanya says:

Doesn't sound like it, I know, but my dad's actually a reasonable guy. He's what they call easily led though, believes everything he reads in the papers, and that makes him say stupid thing. *Do stupid things sometimes.* (Swindells 12)

Ruby Tanya is a confident and smart girl. She sees through her father's mistakes and can be critical of his opinions. Unfortunately, not many children have this confidence being instead easily influenced by the opinions surrounding them, especially coming from a parent or other important adult. Here, teachers have an important role. We cannot always change what opinions people have. However, we can inform and teach tolerance and help young people develop confidence. The curriculum states that students should "[...] develop their ability to think critically, examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different

alternatives” (Skolverket 5). Teaching *Ruby Tanya* is a way of reaching this specific goal at the same time as keeping the students entertained and aware of the consequences of discrimination.

Furthermore, using *Ruby Tanya* in the classroom is an excellent way of teaching students about the difficulties immigrants have in a new country and teaching them to look at each other with an open mind. In chapter thirty-one in the novel, some of the opponents of the camp scare the asylum seekers by driving up to the camp with cars, turning the head lights on and honking. A harmless prank to let the inhabitants of the camp know they are not welcome, however, to the asylum seekers, already in agonizing pain from the war at their country, the fear of a new attack bring backs memories and a panic only they can understand. Using literature like this might increase the comprehension for other people’s reality and help students to look at situations in society with different eyes.

Moreover, students develop what Tricia Hedge calls “critical reading” which means they will be introduced to the unfamiliar values of different cultures and widen their horizons (197). This will also encourage the student to build a language awareness when reading other texts (Hedge 199), which is another goal in the curriculum stating that students should “have the ability to critically examine and assess what they see, hear and read in order to be able to discuss and take a view on different issues concerning life and values” (Skolverket 9).

There are plenty of ways to teach this novel in a meaningful way, suited both to the curriculum and the syllabus of the English subject in upper secondary school. Later in the essay, I will give concrete didactic examples on how the novel can be taught using intercultural pedagogy.

1.3 Possible difficulties when teaching *Ruby Tanya*

Robert Swindells novel *Ruby Tanya* is clearly addressing islamophobia in our modern and western world. It brings light to the consequences of prejudice and shows how vague the boundaries between prejudice and racism are. Therefore, I believe teaching *Ruby Tanya* is extremely important. However, some difficulties might occur.

To teach this novel in a proper way, intercultural pedagogy must pervade the education. The theory behind intercultural pedagogy is that teachers have to be self-critical towards their own culture, religion, and identity: basically, they have to be self-critical towards their own reality to be able to achieve intercultural pedagogy. Because only then, are our minds open enough to accept others' realities and cultures. The problems that might occur is that some teachers might think an intercultural perspective on pedagogy means neglecting their own culture and identity to be able to approach and accept somebody else's. Researcher Yousef Morshidi, from Södertörn University tells the story of a student that was upset about all the discussion regarding interculturality within the teacher trainee program. The student claimed that more time and effort should be given to the didactic aspects and the actual knowledge teachers need to accomplish their work. Too much time was put on cultural and religious acceptance according to the student, who claimed culture and religion need to be practiced at home and also left there when leaving the home (Morshidi 173-177). Morshidi means that this student is stuck in a mono-cultural thinking process and is lacking a political and philosophical perspective on interculturality. Culture is much more than an activity that can be left at home: it is a part of our identity (Goldstein-Kyaga et al. 179). However, if people think that interculturality is a threat toward their own culture even more energy and resources are needed in the teacher trainee program to develop intercultural pedagogy since the curriculum clearly requires tolerance and acceptance in school (Skolverket 4).

Since *Ruby Tanya* specifically portrays islamophobia and the prejudices against Muslim refugees, I feel it is important to clarify that the discrimination and prejudices illustrated in the novel are applicable to any kind of "Otherness". Some teachers might claim the novel irrelevant due the fact that they do not work in a multi-cultural environment. However, discrimination is not isolated to only religious beliefs but is unfortunately presents as soon as differences are visible between people. The issues in the novel are therefore applicable regardless of what ethnicity the majority of the class belongs to.

Questions regarding the relevance of the novel might occur since the setting of *Ruby Tanya* is in England and not Sweden. Will the students have the capacity to adapt the story and apply

the concept of prejudice to their own environment? I do not believe this will be an issue since England and Sweden are relatively close both geographically and culturally. England has cities like London and Birmingham where the diversity of people is vast, just like Gothenburg or Malmö in Sweden and cities like the fictive Tipton Lacey where the majority of the people are English, Sweden also has cities where the majority are still Swedes. As mentioned earlier, the need for intercultural pedagogy or the importance of teaching *Ruby Tanya* should not lay in the specific environmental situation of the class or school, it should lay in the fact that our world is changing and requires tolerance in a whole new way.

2. Theory

This chapter will contain the terms and theories for this essay, namely, multiculturalism and intercultural pedagogy. We live in a multicultural society and our schools are therefore also multicultural but what tools do teachers have to best ensure a safe and equal treatment and education for all students?

2.1 Multiculturalism in Sweden

From the late middle ages until the 1960s, Sweden was considered a relatively homogenous country. Around the 1960s, more foreigners came to the country. The population of Muslims in Sweden was a couple of hundred when in the middle of the 1990s that number increased to approximately 200 000 (Sander et al. 30). Many religious communities coexist here, roughly 7% of the Swedish population is involved in some “foreign religious tradition”. Sander explains that: “Religiously or maybe more culturally, this demographical development has caused a whole new 'physical', 'ideological' and 'human' climate in the country” (Sander et al. 31). Sander explains that “foreign religious traditions” are traditions that differ from the traditional Swedish religiosity being mainly secular or “traditionally Christian” (Sander et al. 31). However, explaining that Sweden has become multi-cultural due to the historical process of immigration can be problematic. Magnus Nilsson states that the image that Sweden has transformed from a culturally heterogeneous country to a homogenous country due to immigration can result in what he calls “methodological nationalism” (Nilsson 277). Methodological nationalism means that there is a presumption that people have one identity and one nationality obtained by the nation they were born in. The results of this presumption have created the illusion that Sweden once has been homogenous and that by immigration this order has been disrupted (Nilsson 276-277). Nilsson claims that the consequences of methodological nationalism are that immigrants will be seen as the challengers to the nation’s culture.

Regardless of why and how Sweden became multi-cultural, there are more immigrants in Sweden today than there were fifty years ago. People from all over the world try to coexist in Sweden and the importance is to provide tolerance in society and especially in schools. To be able to understand human life and our society, a great deal of knowledge is needed regarding people’s religion and cultures (Sander et al. 35). Firstly, the term culture needs a definition. Sander explains that experiences show that people, not only in the western world, think of

culture as a static explanation of a whole country's way of behavior (Sander et al. 38). People tend to believe that others act in certain ways due to the fact that they belong to a certain religion, culture, or nationality and most of the time explain their behavior as illogical or irrational, something beyond their own cultural sphere, whereas, when they speak of their own behavior and cultural spheres it is seen as the complete opposite, namely, logical and rational (Sander et al. 38-39). However, culture should instead be explained as a person's concept of reality including ideological beliefs, social norms, and customs and how these aspects are "expressed in formal and informal institutions" (Sander et al. 39). To explain the term more specifically:

Culture is therefore a sum of a person's language, religious beliefs, conceptions regarding the relationship between people (with different religious backgrounds, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, class), marriage traditions, socializations, dress codes and food traditions, art, music, norms and customs. Culture is the individual's thought and life pattern; his norms, roles and role expectations, his sexual relations patterns, communication patterns, behavior patterns and how these are institutionalized. (Sander et al.9)

Thus, culture is far more complex than what we believe it to be.

Sweden is changing and its process towards becoming a multi-cultural country requires more knowledge of its inhabitants to best provide an open-minded environment. The phenomenon of religion is a daily aspect in our society; partly because of the attention religion is given and partly because of globalization and Sweden's move from a relatively homogenous country to a heterogeneous country. In 2004 two millions of the population in Sweden were from a foreign background and one million of those two, were born outside of Sweden (Sander et al.52). The change, however, brings challenges especially for those who are in the minority groups and particularly for teenagers. Searching for identity has always been an issue for young people and growing up in a multi-cultural world can make the search for their identity difficult. The multi-cultural society we have in Sweden is unfortunately segregated and teachers can have a classrooms where the minority group are Swedish students and the majority group are students from other parts of the world and there are classrooms where the majority group are Swedes with students from other parts of the world as minority groups. How I, as a trainee teacher, my colleagues, and other adults in society treat these teenagers will have a great impact on their future.

2.2 Intercultural pedagogy

When living in a multi-cultural society, an integrated way of thinking is necessary, especially in schools. Intercultural pedagogy is a tool for developing this kind of thinking and also for creating an equal education.

2.2.1 What is intercultural pedagogy

Intercultural pedagogy sees culture as a system of meaning or value system, meaning that we need other cultures and realities to complete our own reality (Lahdenperä 2011). We build our realities from social and cultural constructions and being restricted to only our own realities will cause issues. One of these issues is what Pirjo Lahdenperä calls a “way of normality” referring to an unfortunate way of thinking for many people: we say all cultures are supposed to coexist and enrich each other. However, the bottom line is that we believe everybody living in Sweden should be more like Swedes (Lahdenperä 2011). When thinking like this, our own reality and cultures are seen as the norm and therefore an open and understanding consideration for each other is not possible.

To be able to understand how important intercultural pedagogy is and how it should be used some explanations of the term is needed. Why it is named *intercultural* and not *multicultural* pedagogy is best explained with *intercultural* standing for actions and movements between people whereas *multicultural* refers to a certain state of being (Lorentz, Bergstedt 16). Thus, intercultural perspectives are ways to interact in multicultural societies. However, there are some issues with the terms that need to be addressed when discussing intercultural pedagogy. Using the term multicultural education is an accurate way of describing the education, however, the use of the term intercultural education is not as accurate. In *Interkulturella Perspektiv* Hans Lorentz and Bosse Bergstedt describe the issues in the following way:

Multicultural education describes a condition where the education can deal with different values and behaviors from different cultures and therefore be named multicultural education. However, since intercultural describes an action, it does not feel like intercultural and education is good combination of words when describing an interaction between representatives from different cultures. Nevertheless, the term *inter* will therefore match better with the word quality in an education. Through practicing the education in a certain way, the learning becomes intercultural and then *inter* will become a word that stands for action, interaction and change. (Lorentz, Bergstedt 16-17)

What Lorentz and Bergstedt mean is when that teaching with intercultural perspectives, students will learn in the way they are taught and *then* we can see how intercultural pedagogy is a tool for change.

Multiculturalism has its focus on the cultural differences in society when interculturality focuses on the relations that occur when people from different cultures interact. It also addresses the possible conflict that might arise in these situations and on how these conflicts can be solved (Goldstein-Kyaga et al. 101). When having an intercultural perspective on pedagogy it is important to see diversity as something positive. Everybody has different cultural experiences and therefore diversity is everywhere. Also, people have various different identities that overlap and when interaction between people occur the similarities and differences between them are discovered. When students and teachers from different cultures and of different identities meet, an intercultural perspective can ease the problems that are sometimes raised when speaking of people's values and our differences (Gerle 42). Since school is an environment where students and teachers spend many hours of their days, an understanding for one another is of great importance.

2.2.2 How to use intercultural pedagogy

How then can we use this kind of pedagogy? Södertörn University is actively working with intercultural perspectives. In their pamphlet *Interculturality at Södertörn University* they state that interculturality means developing a way of thinking that includes a mutual curiousness and increased understanding for one's own and others' perception of knowledge, ways of thought and value systems. This is implemented throughout education, research, administration and social activities (Lorentz, Bergstedt 17). The theory sounds very appealing and the way Södertörn University deals with these issues should be considered common sense and used everywhere. However, according to Lorentz and Bergstedt the practical pedagogy used today is aimed to help direct students in the journey towards their perception of knowledge. To be able to do this with intercultural pedagogy and perspectives, teachers first need to understand how young people construct their realities, identities and how they create meaning in life (Lorentz, Bergstedt 28). In a multi-cultural society, these constructions vary and teachers need to stay updated and open-minded. Our modern society has taught us to think in dichotomies like "right and wrong" "us and them" or "bad and good" and not until we can break through these coded perceptions can we have an understanding for the people that differ from our own personal reality and the realities surrounding us. When we have done so,

and understood that we are alike and very much unlike each other at the same time, the grounds for social interaction and intercultural communication are possible (Lorentz, Bergstedt 28). Lorentz and Bergstedt explain it in the following way:

Researchers within the field of intercultural pedagogy mean that the particular education in multicultural environments also has to include things like analysis of terms like; perception of knowledge, reproduction of knowledge, the inclusion of the group and excluding in school and society, the process of working with attitudes and prejudice, discussions about integration, segregation, marginalization, racism, sexism and the demand for justice and equality. (Lorentz, Bergstedt 2006:29)

Therefore, to obtain both an intercultural education and an intercultural learning teachers and leaders in school need to be self critical, meaning that they have to be open to revalue their own history, cultures and cultural valuations. When this is done an intercultural learning process can be made possible (Lahdenperä 24).

3. Analysis

In this chapter I will introduce how *Ruby Tanya* can be used in the classroom with a general lesson plan. Also, a literary analysis will be done together with intercultural pedagogy to show how it can be applied in the classroom. Subjects like prejudice, integration, multiculturalism, racism and exclusion will be the themes of discussion when teaching the novel together with an intercultural pedagogy.

Moreover, when teaching this project, the goals of the syllabus should be taken under consideration. The syllabus of the English subject states that students should be given the opportunity to develop (Skolverket 2):

- Understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content
- The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing
- The ability to use different language strategies in different contexts
- The ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations
- The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used

In this analysis, I will show how the project of *Ruby Tanya* will take the goals of the syllabus under consideration meanwhile giving a perfect opportunity to address prejudice.

3.1. A general lesson plan on how to teach *Ruby Tanya* in the classroom

Teaching literature in the classroom can be considered fun by some students and daunting by others. Students have different relations to reading and even for those students who are used to reading, literature in another language than their own might be overwhelming. Therefore, I will combine Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater's theory of using worksheet together with Tricia Hedge's three-phase technique to obtain the best possible outcome of teaching *Ruby Tanya*. Hedge's technique is called the three-phased technique due to the three steps of procedures used to teach a text (Hedge 209-212). The first step is called the pre-reading phase and is used to help students obtain understanding of the topics about the text they are about to endeavor: "This activates their prior knowledge of the topic and any relevant language they might already know" (Hedge 201). The second phase is called the while-reading phase and is used to keep the students active while they read. Exercises are given to help them express their opinions and expectations about the text, to understand the content and to make notes

while reading. Post-reading is the third and last phase and involves activities to tie up the two earlier processes and to help the students look back and use what they have learnt. Collie and Slater's worksheets can be used together with the pre-, while-, and post-reading tasks. My suggestion is to use the worksheets as while-reading exercises for the sections of the novel that will not be studied in class but read at home.

My estimation is that the project of teaching *Ruby Tanya* will take roughly eight weeks. The novel is 245 pages, which will be divided into eight sections of thirty pages, giving one section per week to study. The project will be introduced with a pre-reading exercise that will help the students to familiarize with the terms nationalism, refugee, asylum, prejudice, racism, exclusion and integration. The words will be written on the white-board and the students will be divided into groups, given two of the words and handed out dictionaries. After translating the words and discussing them, they are to present their result to the rest of the class and to explain the meanings of the words and also what they discussed about them; what feelings and associations do they have for the words? The novel is then presented to the class together with a short synopsis.

The worksheets will contain linguistic exercises like grammar and vocabulary and questions about the specific chapters they are reading at the time. During those the weeks where the novel will be discussed during class time, themes such as prejudice, multiculturalism, racism and integration will be the center for the class activities. As the post-reading exercise, the students will be given a role-play to help them summarize the novel and to help them understand why this specific book was chosen for them to read.

Introducing a book like this will not only ease the reading process it will also encourage them to find purpose for their reading. If the students can see the purpose for the reading, they will be able to understand how the reading is valuable for their everyday life as well as for their future (Hedge 194-195).

3.1.2 Prejudice and identity on the schedule

When planning a lesson, four didactic categories need to be taken into consideration: what is being taught? Why is it being taught? How are you teaching it and for whom (Uljens 17-18)? The lesson I am planning will teach about our different identities and the prejudice that students might have regarding the differences between people. I will teach this because I believe we need to address prejudice before it develops into racism since knowledge is the only way to defeat racism. I will use the novel *Ruby Tanya* together with intercultural

pedagogy and perspective to achieve my goals with this lesson. The lesson is aimed at the students studying English 5 at the upper secondary school in Sweden.

In the novel *Ruby Tanya* a bomb goes off in Ruby Tanya and Asra's school, the blame is immediately put on the asylum seekers. However, before media has reported anything about the bomb and before the refugees have met the blaming looks and hurtful words, they themselves know about the blame that is about to take place. The leader of the camp, Mr. Shofiq, shakes his head and says to the others:

We are not so popular in Tipton Lacey, are we? You mark my words: sooner or later somebody is going to suggest that perhaps *we* planted the bomb.

But why would we? Cried the other man. We want to stay in England, make our homes here. Also, it is our children's school, where they are learning English; learning to *be* English. We'd have to be insane even to *dream of...*

You're right, we'd have to be insane, but you see, a lot of people think that's exactly what we are: mad bombers with beards and turbans. (Swindells 5)

Meanwhile, Ruby Tanya's father is planning the Lamp the Camp action. An action that will let the asylum seekers know they are not welcome. He wants help from Ruby Tanya and his wife, Sarah, with the pamphlets he has made for the action:

Mum peeled a flyer off the top, read it, looked at Dad. Lamp the Camp, she said. What does that mean, Ed? You're not thinking of setting the place on fire, I hope?

Don't talk draft Sarah.

What does *lamp* mean then? [...] Mum shook her head. I'm not touching these till I know what they mean Ed. I won't tell anybody else, but I have the right to know what I'm getting involved in.

You're not *getting* involved, Sarah [...]. *I'm* the one who's getting involved. *Somebody* has to.

Why? Asked Mum. Why not leave those poor people alone, Ed? They're not hurting anybody.

Aren't they? Dad was starting to get mad. [...]. *Remember the bomb?* If that's not hurting anybody, what is?

Yes, but you don't know who planted that bomb. You're just assuming-

Look, Sarah, the school's been there for what – a hundred year? Hundred and ten? And in all the time nobody's bombed it. These so-called asylum seekers arrive, and in less than three months the place is blown sky-high. Bit of a coincidence, isn't it?

Mum looked exasperated. Yes, that's exactly what it is, Ed: a bit of a coincidence. (Swindells 29-30)

In these two paragraphs, Swindell touches upon two important aspects of our every day life: identity and prejudice. Who are we? Who decides what people will think about us and what makes us stay loyal to our beliefs, cultures and identities? What are our identities and who creates them? Do we create our own identities or does someone else create them for us? As humans we see ourselves as members of different groups and these groups are what creates our identities. Regardless of if the group is a sport or music interest, religion, class, ethnicity or food customs. What is important, however, is the fact that we do not need to choose one group and that one group and identity alone is not going to represent us (Sen 21). We can combine our identities however we like. This way of looking at our identities is written about in the book *Identitet & Våld* by Amartya Sen, a Indian Professor at Harvard University who claims that unique and given identities are illusions that will cause great danger to our society. Therefore, we have to be very careful of how we address each other. Violence and issues are caused when we apply negative qualities on others and claim that the negative quality is what makes that person's identity (Sen 2006:23).

The discussions between Mr. Shofiq, Ed and Sara that is regarding the blame of the bomb, will be the base for this lesson. The class will be divided into groups and given pictures of random people. They are to look at the pictures and write down the first thought in their mind about the person on the pictures. Who is it? What does he or she do? What culture does he or she represent? What sexuality do they have? What do we know about this person? In other words, the students give the unknown person a quality or label. When this is done, the class looks at the pictures together and tries to answer why they have given the different labels. Did they label the girl with hijab as homosexual? Or the blond girl without a hijab as Muslim? Most likely they did not. These questions build a perfect ground for addressing prejudice. Why did the people of Tipton Lacey blame the asylum seekers? Why should Mr. Shofiq think that the refugees would be blamed for terrorism because they wear turbans and have beards? Are all Muslims terrorists? Why is it so natural for Ed to blame the new comers? Why do we presume we know about other people's identities and what happens if we are wrong? How does it make people feel? All these questions are ways to discuss prejudice in a productive way. If we do not address prejudice and learn to speak about it and never understand that what we think about others might be wrong, then prejudice will develop into racism.

The discussions that will take place during the lesson will help the students to develop "the ability to express themselves and communicate in English in speech and writing" (Skolverket 2) and also to "help their ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used"

(Skolverket 2) which are two of the goals stated in the syllabus of the English subject. Moreover, the curriculum states that students need to learn how to "respect the intrinsic value and integrity of other people" (Skolverket 10), "reject the subjection of people to oppression and degrading treatment" (Skolverket 10) and "can interact with other people based on respect for differences in living conditions, culture, language, religion and history" (Skolverket 10). All these goals are relevant and important goals that can be reached with this lesson on addressing prejudice with the use of *Ruby Tanya*.

However, teachers need to be aware of the risks discussions like these can cause. Racism is a sensitive subject and there might be students who openly express racist comments. The teachers need to be prepared to combat these expressions in a professional way. The idea of teaching *Ruby Tanya* in this project is to address prejudice and discrimination. It is important that teachers take their responsibility and address these issues even though they involve sensitive subjects. The curriculum clearly states "All tendencies to discrimination or degrading treatment should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be confronted with knowledge, open discussion and active measures (Skolverket 4)". Therefore, it is important for teachers not to reject these subjects due to the heated debates they might cause.

3.1.3 Peer pressure and discrimination on the schedule

The aim of this lesson is to show clear examples of how discrimination can hurt us and how important it is that we as humans learn to stand up for injustice and discrimination when we see it. The lesson will involve discussion regarding the mentioned subjects, two passages from *Ruby Tanya* and Jane Elliot's famous blue-eyes/brown-eyes experiment (Elliott 2003-2006). Ruby Tanya has spotted her father and his friends in a shopping mall. The man her father is seen with wears a donkey jacket and has a shaved head. One day, the man in the donkey jacket sees Ruby Tanya when she is out with Asra. Ruby Tanya understands that the man is in trouble but she does not mention anything until the day her father criticizes her friend Asra:

And where have you been all day, young woman?
Danmouth, I said [...]. Didn't Mum tell you?

Never you mind what Mum told me, you cheeky young devil. It's what a friend of mine told me that I'm concerned about. Who's Asra Saber?

Girl at school.

Best friend, according to *my* friend.

That's right, Dad, Asra's my best friend.

Comes from the camp, I suppose?

Yes, but she hasn't got a scuffy old donkey jacket and manners like a hyena. He hit me then, an open-handed slap on my left cheek that shocked more than it hurt [...]. He didn't try to hit me again, but spoke in a quiet, husky voice: You're twelve, Ruby Tanya, he said. Twelve years of age: too young to citizens your parents' friends, or even to choose your own. [...]. When school starts again a week tomorrow, you will stay well away from Asra Saber. You have a perfectly acceptable friend in Millie Ross [...]. That's what I *call* a best friend. (Swindells 66-67)

Ruby Tanya is a girl who stands up for her beliefs and she is not scared of the consequences her actions will have. Not only does she have the courage to stand up against her father, she also stands up for the kids of the camp when the school bully Keith Allardyce is picking on them:

What you came back here for, eh? He was shouting. We don't want you in our school, stinking the place up, planting bombs. [...] He had his gang with him, of course: a quartet of warped and witless hangers-on who, with their leader, had formed the nucleus of the gallant band which had fallen upon Asra two Saturdays ago. Now they stood in a semi-circle round the bully's victims, one of whom was Asra. (Swindells 74)

Ruby Tanya sees an opportunity to stand up for her friend and fight the bullies. When she has spotted her PE teacher Trayon and knows he is heading towards her direction she slams her backpack in Allardyce's head. She says, "it was all about timing. If Trayon let me down now, my end would be messy. Luckily he didn't", (Swindells 75). The boys get their punishment and the group can go back to playing. Asra says:

She is brilliant, my friend Ruby Tanya. A hero. Keith Allardyce is a big bully and everybody is scared of him, but Ruby Tanya shouts at him a to save my friends and me. If the teacher did not come I think so she will be hurt, but he comes to save us all. (Swindells 76)

Even though violence never is the answer to any kind of problem, Ruby Tanya's courage is something I think should be addressed in this novel. The issue is not whether it was right or wrong to hit the bullies, the issue is whether or not people should stand up for their beliefs and opinions and how courage is gained to do so. The curriculum states that all work in school should "contribute to developing the students' sense of belonging, solidarity, and responsibility towards people outside the immediate group" and that all the students should "strengthen confidence in their own ability to individually and together with others take initiatives, take responsibility and influence their own conditions" (Skolverket 11).

Before discussing these two passages in class, a short documentary called *A class divided* based on Jane Elliott's famous exercise on discrimination will be shown in class. The documentary is about Elliott's exercise on discrimination and prejudice with her third graders in a school in Iowa in 1969. When dividing her class into two parts she gives one of the groups the eye color blue and the others are given the color brown. The brown eyes are inferior and the blue eyes superior. The blue-eyed are given privileges that the others do not have and as soon as the exercise begins the group of children in the blue-eyed group start harassing and discriminating against the children in the brown-eyed group. Elliott says, "I saw wonderful, thoughtful children turn into nasty, vicious, discriminating little third graders" (*A class divided* part 1). Very little is taken to trigger people to discriminate. Small qualities like eye-color or the way your tongue curls can be enough to trigger this kind of behavior (*A class divided* part 3). After a day, the privileges go to the brown-eyed group, the roles are changed and also the group who is discriminated changes. As soon as the brown-eyed group becomes superior they start discriminating against the other group. Interestingly, the same exercise is done on the staff of a correction facility in New York. The inferior group, a group of adults, did not dare to stand up for each other when being discriminated against (*A Class divided* part 5).

After watching the documentary, the two passages from *Ruby Tanya* are discussed. The questions the students are to answer are:

- Why do you think nobody stands up for the group that is inferior in Miss Elliott's exercise?
- Why do you think it only takes a couple of minutes before the children start discriminating against each other?
- Do we have discrimination like this in our society today?
- Would you have stood up for somebody who is being discriminated against, like Ruby Tanya does?
- What happens if we just look away and shift the problem to somebody else?
- Why do we, even as adults, submit to authorities so blindly when Ruby Tanya stand up against the authoritarian leader in her life, namely her father?

The discussions during this lesson will prepare the students for the final lesson in the project of *Ruby Tanya* that will be a role-play on prejudice, racism, discrimination and courage.

3.1.4 Role-play on the schedule

As the post-reading (Hedge12) and last exercise for the project on *Ruby Tanya*, a role-play on the main subjects of the novel will take place. The purpose of this exercise is to illustrate situations where discrimination might occur and how people might react to it. The students will have two options, either they create a situation they have experienced or seen or they can choose from some concrete examples given by the teacher.

The class is divided into groups of four people. One role is given to each member of the group. One role represents someone with racist and discriminating opinions. One role represents the person being discriminated against and the two other roles represent supporters for each opinion. Possible subjects for the role-play are:

- A situation at a party where somebody is not welcome to join the others due to his/her/sexuality/culture etcetera.
- A situation like Asra and Ruby Tanya's where they are not allowed to be friends due to Asra's background.
- A situation where a couple are not allowed to love each other due to their religious/cultural differences.
- A situation like when Ruby Tanya stands up against the bullies.

These are only examples of how this role-play can be used. The students will probably have plenty of ideas themselves. What I think is important to achieve is how it felt for the students who were discriminated against and if the person who supports the discriminated dared to stand up in the role-play or not.

The Education Act states: "Each and every one within the education system shall foster the human rights and actively refute all forms of offending treatments" (SFS 2010:800 §5). It is my job as a teacher to actively work with subjects that are relevant to prevent prejudice and discrimination. The curriculum also states that teachers should "make clear the fundamental democratic values of Swedish society and human rights, and together with the students discuss conflicts that can occur between these values and rights and actual events" (Skolverket 11). These two statements alone are reason enough to encourage this role-play based on *Ruby Tanya*.

3.2. The role of intercultural pedagogy in the project of teaching *Ruby Tanya*

As mentioned in section 2.2.2, intercultural pedagogy is used when we as teachers and leaders can be self-critical towards our own reality to understand somebody else's reality (Lorentz 2006). Our reality is built from our social and cultural constructions (Lahdenperä 2011) and if we only keep our reality as the only legitimate reality, others will be hurt.

When planning the lessons for the project of teaching *Ruby Tanya* an intercultural way of thinking must exist, firstly to be able to understand Asra's role in the novel but also to understand Ruby Tanya's open tolerance. Swindells is addressing a sensitive subject when he writes this novel. We live in a world where islamophobia is a daily issue in the media. We often hear about words like "islamization", "fundamentalism" and "terrorism" and all these negatively loaded words are related to Islam. As Amartya Sen mentions, "to assign other people negatively charged attributes means disrespecting and degrading them [...]". Amartya Sen states that by forcing others with identities they have not chosen means forcing them to something they are not and the result will always show itself in violence (Sen 2006:23). Therefore, the novel *Ruby Tanya* is filled with important issues about peoples' differences and is absolutely necessary to discuss in the classroom.

It is also necessary to use novels such as *Ruby Tanya* when speaking about Islam and Muslims. The main issues in the novel are exclusion, discrimination and prejudice, which are important to address. Since we are taught to think in dichotomies about what is morally right, our beliefs are based on the westernized and "modern" world's dichotomies (Lorentz, Bergstedt 28). To prevent problems for the students or parents of those who seem "different" the intercultural work and pedagogy in the educational system must improve and develop the education based on the diversity we have in our schools today. The diversity we have in our schools demand a certain need to reflect about the intercultural identities of the young and finding ways to prevent discrimination and marginalization (Lahdenperä, Lorentz 7-8). As Lahdenperä and Lorentz claim we need to find a platform where the statement "An Us that admits the unique You" (translated from: Ett Vi som erkänner ett unikt Du) will be true (51). By this the authors of the book *Möten i mångfaldens skola* mean that teachers and leaders together with the students can create a term like this to prevent exclusion (Lahdenperä, Lorentz 51). To have this thought process when planning to teach literature like *Ruby Tanya*, an awareness of equality will be passed on from the teacher to the students.

Hans Lorentz claims that the subject of English is a perfect platform for teaching in a way that can contribute to a greater understanding for an intercultural awareness. The intercultural understanding becomes the main ingredient in the education and the language a way of

reaching this goal. Lorentz also claims that: “[...] it is an integration of two important components; communication and intercultural understanding, so that the students will be given a possibility to develop an intercultural communicative competence” (Lorentz 182). This specific competence is needed for the students to be able to function in this globalized, internationalized and multi-cultural world. By teaching the students to look through the eyes of somebody else, they can learn to be prepared when meeting diversity in our world (Lorentz 183).

4. Conclusion and final reflections

The transformation of Sweden, from the relatively mono-cultural country it has once been to the multi-cultural country it is today, requires plenty of work to prevent its people from experiencing discrimination, especially in school. The curriculum claims that the school should prevent all types of discrimination and promote understanding for all people (Skolverket 4). Intercultural pedagogy is a pedagogical theory that can help to achieve these goals and to present an education based on the diversity in Swedish schools today. Studies have shown that up to 40% of students have felt discrimination and many of them reported that the discrimination came from teachers (Lorentz 21). Therefore, the aim of my essay has been to promote intercultural pedagogy together with the subject of English when addressing the discrimination and prejudice that might occur in the classroom. The thesis statement for this project is that we can address these issues through literature and the novel used to state my thesis is Robert Swindells's *Ruby Tanya*.

The novel *Ruby Tanya* addresses many of the problems that are relevant in our society today. The little village of Tipton Lacey, which has been occupied by Englishmen is now also a home for asylum seekers. The fear of people that differ from us is remarkable and well shown in *Ruby Tanya*. America, England and most other parts of Europe are constantly presenting us with words like terrorism and islamization into our minds at the same time as media keeps adding reasons for us to fear the ones that differ from us. The binary opposition between "us" and "them" is growing wider meanwhile globalization and internationalization are driving people closer to each other. The friction is therefore inevitable and prejudice will only increase if we do not address it in time. The novel *Ruby Tanya* specifically addresses the islamophobia that is growing in our world. However, the issues in *Ruby Tanya* can be applied to various different discriminations regarding nationalities, cultures and sexualities that are considered abnormal or wrong according to the reality or cultures we live in. Through *Ruby Tanya* we can teach interculturally and teach students to be open-minded and understand that we are very much alike at the same time that we are very much unlike each other (Lorentz, Bergstedt 28). The main point is that we are all humans and we all deserve to live a life without discrimination, especially in school where we are supposed to feel safe.

I have during this project read various articles on intercultural pedagogy, however, I have not found any critical opinions on this theory. Personally, I believe that an intercultural pedagogy should be adopted by all teachers and that it will help us combat discrimination in

school. Therefore, I want to believe that intercultural pedagogy is a theory that is difficult to dislike or disapprove of. Nevertheless, interculturality is an infected subject. As mentioned in section 1.3 some might feel that intercultural pedagogy will require a rejection of one's own culture and identity instead of seeing the possibility to learn about others. There are probably many critical voices to multiculturalism in Sweden. Sverigedemokraterna, Sweden's nationalist party is one example. They claim multiculturalism as one of the main problems in Swedish schools and the importance of preserving the Swedish cultural heritage. For instance, they wish to forbid other languages than Swedish to be spoken in schools and to eliminate the native language classes that Swedish schools offer to bilingual students (UR). These opinions are far from the perspectives intercultural pedagogy proclaims and could possibly be seen as a kind of criticism to intercultural pedagogy. Nevertheless, these are all my speculation.

When planning the lessons for the project of teaching *Ruby Tanya*, I have taken under consideration the syllabus for the subject of English (2011), the curriculum for the upper secondary school (2011) and the Education Act (2010) and my conclusion is that Robert Swindells's *Ruby Tanya* is an effective way of addressing prejudice in our multi-cultural schools and it also helps teachers to implement intercultural pedagogy in a way that is necessary. If possible, I also suggest an interdisciplinary project between the subjects of religion and English when teaching *Ruby Tanya*. I believe a collaboration between these two subjects can result in more hours to work on and analyze the novel and also to provide an opportunity to develop subjects like religion, culture, ethics and moral more deeply.

In school, discrimination, xenophobia, prejudice and racism have no place and the teachers are the only ones who can help prevent and eliminate this and more importantly they can teach the students about the harmful and nasty effects. We have learnt what is required to apply the thought process of intercultural pedagogy to obtain tolerance and acceptance toward each other. Robert Swindells's *Ruby Tanya* is a valuable, resourceful and efficient way of accomplishing these goals.

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